LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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TED CAME RUNNING UP TO THE TWO RASCALS.
Ted Scott: The Lone Eagle of the Border. *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER

OR

TED SCOTT AND THE DIAMOND SMUGGLERS

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS"
"SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE"
"THE HARDY BOYS: THE SHORE ROAD MYSTERY," ETC.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight

RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air

OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
Or Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness

FIRST STOP HONOLULU
Or Ted Scott Over the Pacific

THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS
Or Ted Scott Over the West Indies

SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE
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ACROSS THE PACIFIC
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THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE CAVES

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The Lone Eagle of the Border

Made in the United States of America

TO THE HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

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The first to fly the English Channel

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The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

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And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and Present who, by their daring exploits, have made aviation the wonderful achievement it is to-day

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	A Test of Skill	1
II	A Scurvy Scheme	11
III	On the Wing	26
IV	The Storm Breaks	36
V	Foul Play	45
VI	A Rascal Foiled	55
VII	When Rogues Fall Out	65
VIII	Smashing the Record	72
IX	Whirling Fists	82
X	An Unexpected Letter	91
XI	Dire Threats	97
XII	A Close Call	106
XIII	An Ugly Adversary	116
XIV	Sorely Pressed	122
XV	Wily Scoundrels	132
XVI	Strong Temptation	142

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII	Bill Turns Up	148
XVIII	Finding a Clue	155
XIX	In Hot Pursuit	163
XX	A Jump for Life	171
XXI	Just in Time	177
XXII	Stealthy Plotting	186
XXIII	The Rendezvous	192
XXIV	Rattlesnake Pit	200
XXV	Captured	206

THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER

CHAPTER I

A Test of Skill

"If any airman can beat the record already made, that man is Ted Scott," declared Mark Lawson, as he stood in a group of young men on the flying field of Bromville.

"You seem to be pretty certain of it," remarked one of the bystanders, with a smile that indicated that he himself was not so sure.

"Why shouldn't I be?" returned Mark. "It's the safest bet in the world that that lad can do whatever he sets out to do. No job's too tough for him to tackle."

"He sure has the victory habit," chimed in Breck Lewis. "He never yet has come out second best in anything he's undertaken."

"Oh, I grant that he's good," said the first objector. "But there's no man in the world so good that he may not at some time come up against a man that is better. It's so in every

line of sport or achievement. The champion prize fighter may some day lose his crown, the tennis or golf expert be dethroned."

"That may be true in some lines," admitted Mark. "But it won't apply to Ted Scott. You'll see, Farley, that he'll make all the rest of these fellows look like thirty cents."

"Sure he will," echoed Jack Forrest. "The thing's already in the bag for Ted."

"Look at the way he copped that altitude record!" put in Breck Lewis. "Got further toward heaven than any man that ever stood in shoe leather. Gee, that was some stunt! Cylinders exploding, bolts whizzing through the wings, plane turning topsy-turvy, air tube blown from his mouth, yet keeping his nerve through it all and bringing his plane to a perfect landing when any other man would have been smashed to bits! Take it from me, there's no airman living that's in the same class with Ted Scott."

"He carries my money every time he starts," vouchsafed Mark Lawson emphatically.

"I don't know," said Farley, shaking his head dubiously. "He's got some pretty tough birds to contend against. There's Hardwick and Bagley and Stinson, and none of them is a slouch when it comes to any kind of flying. Then, too, just on the law of averages, I've a notion that Ted Scott is due for a tumble."

"You think so, do you?" returned Mark. "Well, every man has a right to his own opinion. Care to risk any money to back up your judgment?"

"Well, maybe so," drawled Farley. "But of course you ought to give me odds on the strength of Ted Scott's reputation."

"Whom do you want to bet on?" asked Mark.

"Of the other three, I think that Hardwick has the best chance," replied Farley, "but I don't want to pick out any special one. I'll simply bet that one of the three will beat Ted Scott."

"What, then, do you mean by talking about wanting odds?" asked Mark. "That gives you three chances to win, while we have only one chance to win if we bet on Ted Scott."

"Right enough," agreed Farley. "But if you fellows are sure that Ted has it already in the bag, I should think you'd be willing to give me the edge on the betting. His reputation makes him a natural favorite."

Mark pondered for a moment.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "If you'll pick out any of the other fellows, Hardwick, Bagley, or Stinson, I'll bet you three to one on Ted. But if you want to include all three, I'll bet you even money that Ted beats them all."

"That last proposition hits me hardest,"

said Farley. "How much do you want to put up?"

"How about twenty-five dollars?" suggested Mark, who had little else than his weekly wage to depend upon.

"All right, though I'd rather you'd make it a hundred," returned Farley.

"Don't let that bother you," said Breck Lewis. "I'll take another twenty-five on the same terms."

"I'll take another slice of twenty-five," added Jack Forest eagerly.

"And you can put me down for the rest of your hundred," declared Bill Ellison.

"Done!" exclaimed Farley. "And may the best man win."

Similar wagers were being made all over the field, some in much larger amounts, as many of the visitors were men of wealth who had come either as participants in or spectators of the golf tournament that was being held that week on the superb links attached to the Hotel Exselsior, the most palatial caravansery in the town of Bromville.

But far eclipsing the golf tournament was the endurance flight for airplanes that was scheduled for the day following that on which the above conversation took place. The whole town was ablaze with interest and excitement, and this was shared by thousands in all the

other places within easy reach of Bromville. The town was already crowded with visitors and there was every indication that Bromville had never had such a throng as would be present on the day the contest was slated to begin.

The endurance contest was a matter not only of national but of international interest, for the pride of America was enlisted in the attempt to bring the coveted record from overseas. At the time it was held by two German fliers, who had achieved the feat of remaining in the air for more than sixty-five hours. It had been a noteworthy feat and had set up a record that would be hard to beat.

Four contestants had entered, all being among the most noted airmen of the country. But what stirred Bromville to the depths was the fact that its famous townsman, Ted Scott, was entered in the competition.

Ted Scott, the idol of America, the first man to fly the Atlantic from New York to Paris, the gallant aviator about whom all the world had gone mad! They fairly worshipped him in Bromville. He was without dispute the town's first citizen.

To his initial exploit he had added many others. He had flown from San Francisco to Honolulu across the Pacific in the best time ever made by man, and later had spanned that mighty ocean to the continent of Australia. He

had broken the world's record for altitude flights. As Breck Lewis had said, he had never come out second in anything he had undertaken, and in this present flight for the endurance record, Bromville was behind him to a man. Whatever wagers were laid against him were made by visitors. A Bromville man would have felt himself guilty of treason if he bet against Ted Scott.

"Well, we're in for twenty-five apiece," remarked Mark Lawson as, with Breck, Jack, and Bill, he made his way over the field to a spot where a young fellow was carefully going over an airplane that had been rolled out from its hangar.

"Twenty-five juicy berries," agreed Breck, "and I count the bet as good as won already."

"Same here," observed Jack. "I wouldn't take twenty-four in cash if Farley offered to settle right now."

"It's almost a shame to take the money," averred Breck, with serene confidence. "Hello, Ted!" he called, as the group came up to the young aviator above mentioned. "How's tricks?"

"Hello, fellows!" replied Ted Scott, straightening up from the machine over which he had been bending.

He was tall and lithe with wavy brown hair and eyes of the same color. His powerful frame

had not an ounce of superfluous flesh on it and his supple, gliding muscles were those of a panther. He was slightly flushed from his exertions and his face bore the inimitable smile that won all hearts.

"Going to win the endurance test?" asked Mark.

"Who knows?" replied Ted. "All I know is that I'm going to do my best."

"You've just got to win now," declared Jack, grinning. "You're carrying a hundred dollars of our money."

"Is that so?" laughed Ted. "You boys are getting reckless with your cash."

"I almost feel unsportsmanlike," observed Bill Ellison. "Like betting on a sure thing."

"Don't kid yourself," warned Ted seriously. "It's by no means a sure thing. A lot of chances enter into any competition like this. The engine may go wrong, the gas may give out, there may be a leak in the tank, a collision may take place. Any one of a hundred things may happen."

"True enough," admitted Mark. "But we're betting that things that happen to other men won't happen to Ted Scott. Or, if they do happen, he'll find a way to counteract them. A hundred things have happened to you before, but you've never come to grief."

"Had great luck so far, but there's no know-

ing when old lady Fate may throw me down," said Ted modestly.

"Luck!" snorted Mark. "The world doesn't call it luck. They call it pluck, nerve, genius—"

What other qualities Mark would have added to his enthusiastic tribute to his friend will never be known, for just then the whistle blew and Mark and his friends trooped into the aero plant where they were employed and which adjoined the flying field.

Left alone, Ted resumed his work on his machine, a new creation which embodied the latest devices in aviation and that had been constructed under his own personal supervision. He had named it the Browning for his foster father, and was inordinately proud of it. As far as the machine itself was concerned, he felt sure that there was nothing in the race that could compete with it in buoyancy, stability, speed, and power.

Now he was giving it the last inspection before the race that would take place on the morrow. He examined it with the same detail that a jeweler gives to the delicate works of a watch. He was determined that it should be in as perfect condition as human care and skill could make it.

He opened the control wires and oiled the hinges on the control surfaces. He examined the cooling system and connections. Not a part

of the landing gear, wheels, fittings, and shock absorbers escaped his eye. He tested the main plane external bracing, including fittings and struts, external wires, cables and turnbuckles. The engine exhaust manifold and exhaust pipe extensions received his attention. He insured the proper functioning of carburetors and fuel-feed lines. He saw that the cowlings were properly secured and safetied. He saw to the propeller alignment. He ascertained that every part of the engine installation was in perfect order. He went over every inch of the fuselage.

Hard work and exacting it was, but he loved it. The plane was his sweetheart. To him it seemed a living thing. He identified himself with it. It was a part of himself, his companion in all daring and glorious enterprises. It seemed to him a living, breathing pulsing entity. At times he found himself talking to it as though it were a sentient being that could respond.

Engrossed in his work, he failed to notice the approach of a little group of persons until they were comparatively close to him. Then he looked up and his eyes encountered those of Hardwick, one of the contestants in the coming race.

Hardwick was a thickset man with features that were a trifle flabby, while marks of dissi-

pation were beginning to show about his eyes.

He was a skillful flier, however, and had achieved quite a reputation in aviation circles. Ted had met him several times, but had never cultivated his acquaintance. There was something about the man that he did not like, and he had heard some things about Hardwick that were hardly consistent with good sportsmanship.

Still, Ted nodded to the man pleasantly enough and resumed his work on the machine. Hardwick nodded rather churlishly in response, and, with his companions, removed himself to a little distance.

Not so far away, however, did the party go but that some scraps of their conversation floated to Ted's ears.

"He's just a false alarm," sneered Hardwick. "Has had a lot of fool luck and people look upon him as a little tin god. I'm going to make a show of him in this race. He's got a swelled head, but his cap will fit him when I get through with him."

CHAPTER II

A Scurvy Scheme

Ted Scott whirled about, his eyes blazing. He strode up to Hardwick.

"Were you, by any chance, referring to me?" asked Ted, controlling himself with difficulty.

Hardwick seemed as though he were going to make an insolent retort. But he looked into Ted's eyes and then at his clenched fists and his courage wilted.

"Nothing of the kind," he muttered thickly. "Was talking about a fellow that I'm going to race against in Texas about a month from now."

Ted stared at him, and before that glance of steady contempt Hardwick's eyes fell.

"Oh," said Ted politely. "Pardon me. My mistake."

He turned and went back to his work. Hardwick glanced after him, seemed about to shout a surly defiance, but thought better of it and sullenly drifted away, followed by his cronies.

Ted's anger subsided as he became more absorbed in his work, and in a little while he had almost forgotten the incident.

He would, however, have regarded it as of more importance if he had been an unseen listener at a conversation that had taken place recently between Hardwick and Brewster Gale, the latter the proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior, where Hardwick had taken up his quarters while preparing for the endurance contest.

Little was known of Gale's life before he settled in Bromville, but from time to time stories of the shady way in which he had accumulated his money leaked out. He was regarded as a man who would stop at nothing to achieve his ends. Hardwick, before he entered the field of aviation, had known Gale intimately and had even been used as a tool by the older man in the prosecution of some of his swindling schemes. They were birds of a feather and neither had any illusions concerning the character of the other. It was entirely natural that when Hardwick came to Bromville he should put up at Gale's hotel.

"Hello Jack!" Gale greeted him. "Glad to see you again. So you're going to take part in the endurance contest, are you? Here's hoping that you win."

"That's good of you, Brew," answered Hardwick, as the pair shook hands. "Thanks."

"Not only for your own sake," went on Gale, "but because if you do win, it'll mean that

you've licked Ted Scott. Gee, how I hate that fellow!"

"I haven't any use for him myself," answered Hardwick. "It gives me a pain in the neck to see how everybody bows before the fellow. But I didn't expect to hear you talk that way. I thought that everybody in Bromville thought that he was the greatest thing that ever happened."

"I hate him!" burst out Gale viciously, as he bit off the end of a cigar. "The happiest day I'll ever know will be when I learn that he has broken his neck."

Hardwick was startled by the malignity of the words and the tone in which they were spoken.

"Gee, but you're hot under the collar!" he exclaimed. "What has he done to rile your naturally sweet disposition? Tell it to papa. Spill it."

Gale frowned at the attempt at levity.

"It's no joking matter," he snapped. "That fellow has cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars. Blast him!"

Hardwick sat up with a jerk.

"That sounds serious!" he exclaimed. "How could he put over anything like that on the slick article I know you to be? If it were the other way round, I could understand it. Any

one has got to be good to get the best of you in a money deal. Tell me all about it. We understand each other. There's no need of any secrecy between us. Each of us knows enough about the other to put him in jail," he added, with a shameless grin.

"It was this way," said Gale, who seemed to find a certain relief for his feelings in talking over things that he had to keep secret from most people, but could speak freely of to one of his own kind. "You see this property of mine—the hotel and the golf course. Anything the matter with it?"

"I should say not," replied Hardwick, as he took in the rich surroundings. "Some swell joint, if you ask me. Nothing finer than this in any part of the country, except in some of the big cities."

"Right you are!" agreed Gale. "I got the ground for a mere song. Got it from an old mossback here, the fellow that runs the shebang he calls the Bromville House. Everything was O. K. and I was sitting pretty when along comes this fellow Scott and upsets the beans."

"How was that?" asked Hardwick, with quickened interest.

"Got to looking up the matter of the deal I'd made with old Browning," replied Gale. "Went around saying that the thing wasn't on

the up and up, that there was something crooked in it."

"And of course there wasn't," remarked Hardwick with a sly wink.

Gale caught the wink and smiled sourly.

"Well, I was looking of course after my own interests," he admitted. "If old Browning was a fool, that wasn't my fault. What are sheep for, if not to be shorn? I had good lawyers who knew how to manage those matters. The old man didn't have a cent to hire lawyers with, but that wasn't my concern."

"Of course not," agreed Hardwick. "Go on. I'm anxious to know where Scott came in."

"He was a brat that Browning adopted," snarled Gale. "Someway or other, he got friendly with a rich fellow, chap named Hapworth, and put him wise to the deal with Browning. That started Hapworth to looking up the matter of the golf course in which he and a fellow named Monet had a good deal of money invested and which I was managing. They said I'd been juggling with the books and fattening my bank account at their expense. They made such a fuss about it that I had to give up a lot of money to keep them from yapping to the police."

"Mighty unreasonable of them," observed Hardwick sardonically.

"They tried at the same time to make me come across with the money they said I owed Browning, but I stood pat there because they couldn't actually prove anything," went on Gale. "Then what does this Ted Scott do but hunt up a missing witness when he was working down South during the Mississippi flood and bring him North with him. The fat was in the fire then. It was a matter of ponying up or going to jail, and I chose to settle."

"Hard luck, old man," condoled Hardwick.

"You said it!" Gale agreed. "But there was worse than that to come. You've heard of course about Greg and Duck?" He referred to his twin sons, Gregory and Duckworth.

"Yes," replied Hardwick, a little reluctant to refer to so delicate a subject, "I heard that they'd been jailed, but I don't recall just now what it was for."

"Oh, they got into a little trouble down at the Bromville House," said Gale hesitatingly. He forbore to mention that the "little trouble" was an attempt by the rascals to rob Eben Browning's safe, in the course of which they had clubbed the old man and his wife into insensibility. "Just a matter of boyish high spirits more than anything else. Anyway, they thought it was better to leave town till the thing blew over. Then Ted Scott came across them

in Porto Rico, captured them, handed them over to the police, had them brought back and tried and sent to prison. Do you wonder that I hate that fellow worse than poison?"

"No, I don't," replied Hardwick. "It's natural you should want to get even with him."

"That's why I'm so keen that you should beat him in this endurance contest," Gale declared. "I want to see him beaten, humiliated, made to look and feel cheap right here in the town where the fools have put him on a pedestal. I'd sure give ten years of my life to have it happen."

"You sure are a good hater," remarked Hardwick. "I haven't any use for the fellow myself. He's hogging the limelight, and you'd think to hear some people talk that there isn't any other aviator in the United States that amounts to a hill of beans. I'm going to do my best to down him. Still, he has an awful amount of luck and it will take a lot to beat him."

"There's more than one way to kill a cat," suggested Gale, with a significant glance at his old-time confederate.

"Meaning?" said Hardwick, in a tone of inquiry.

"Meaning just what you want to put into it," replied Gale. "I'm not an aviator. But there

are tricks in every trade and you ought to know some in yours. The point is to beat him, no matter how you do it."

"H-m!" said Hardwick musingly. "I get you, Brew. There are some little things I know, but it would be taking a big risk to pull off any raw stuff in this town. I'd be lynched, if folks got next to it."

"Take a chance," urged Gale. "If you get away with it, I'll give you a cool thousand dollars."

Hardwick considered for a moment.

"Make it two thousand," he said, "and I'll talk turkey with you."

"Two it is," replied Gale without a moment's hesitation. "Now, tell me what you have in mind."

While the precious pair of rascals are plotting their nefarious scheme, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted Scott was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted could not remember anything about his parents. When he was old enough to know anything he found himself in the care of James and Miranda Wilson, who had adopted him and brought him with them from New England to Bromville, a thriving town in the Middle West. They were in humble circumstances, but they

cared tenderly for the little waif, sent him to school and did all for him that their slender means permitted. They died within a few months of each other when Ted was about ten years old, leaving no means for the maintenance of the child.

His forlorn condition attracted the notice of a childless couple, Eben and Charity Browning, and they took the little fellow into their hearts and home. Eben Browning, a kindly, genial man, was the proprietor of the Bromville House, which at that time was the leading hotel of the town. Traveling men liked to stop there because of the homely comfort of the place and there was a considerable clientage of anglers who came to fish in the Rappock River.

A new impetus was given to Bromville when the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation established a mammoth airplane plant there. Hundreds of workmen and officers and executives became residents of the place. Other industries were established and the town began to boom. New hotels sprang up almost over night, and Eben found himself facing stiff competition. His own hotel had become rather shabby and run down, and the new ones were equipped with up-to-date facilities.

The greatest blow to his tottering fortunes was the building of the Hotel Excelsior by Brewster Gale. It far outshone all others and

was indeed almost palatial. Eben's chagrin was heightened by the way he was swindled by Gale, as has been already narrated.

Ted Scott did all that he could to help his foster parents, whom he loved devotedly, working about the place, besides earning what money he could by doing odd jobs. When the airplane plant came he secured work there, turning over practically all his earnings to Eben and Charity. He was industrious and ingenious and was rapidly advanced in positions until he found himself in the assembling department. He loved his work. He had always been fascinated by airplanes and the great ambition of his life was to become a flier.

To the plant one morning came Walter Hapworth, an expert golfer who was taking part in a tournament. He was a young and wealthy business man, interested in airplanes. Ted was assigned to show the visitor about the works. The boy showed himself so familiar with everything concerning airplanes, could answer so readily and intelligently any question about them, that Mr. Hapworth was impressed. He learned of the lad's ambition to be an airman and offered to give Ted money enough to go to a flying school and also to make up for his wages while he was away. Ted was astonished and delighted. He finally accepted the

offer, but as a loan which he afterward repaid.

At the school he showed such an aptitude for flying, such nerve, skill, resource, and quick thinking that all agreed that a remarkable career lay before him.

Following his graduation, he applied for and received a position in the Air Mail Service. His route lay between Chicago and St. Louis and he soon became known as the finest flier in his division.

About that time the whole country was agog with interest over the offer of twenty-five thousand dollars to the airman who should first make a non-stop flight from New York to Paris. Ted was intensely anxious to take part in the competition, but his lack of the many thousands of dollars required to purchase a plane and provide for other necessary expenses seemed to put him out of the running. But Walter Hapworth learned of his desire and offered to provide the requisite backing.

Ted obtained leave of absence from the Air Service and went out to the Pacific Coast, where he had a plane built under his own personal supervision. He named it the Hapworth in honor of his benefactor. When it was ready he stepped into it for the trip from San Francisco to New York.

He left San Francisco and whizzed over

the Rockies to St. Louis in a single jump in the fastest time that had ever been made by a man flying alone.

Instantly the newspapers took notice. This young aviator out of the West caught the imagination. And when in one more jump Ted took off from St. Louis and came down the next day at Curtiss Field in New York, his name was on every tongue.

Reporters swarmed around him. Crowds followed him wherever he went. But unspoiled by the popular acclaim, Ted Scott went calmly on with his work of preparation. Then on one misty morning he soared into the skies and set the nose of his plane toward the Atlantic.

What perils of fog and sleet and storm he met and mastered, with what superb skill and nerve he guided his plane over the yeasty surges, how he reached France and swooped down on the field at Le Bourget near Paris, winning the prize and setting the world aflame with admiration, is told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris."

Soon after his return to his own country, the great tragedy of a Mississippi flood stirred the heart of the nation, and Ted enlisted in the aviation section of the Red Cross. Here he did magnificent work in rescuing and succoring the

distressed people and won once more the gratitude of the country.

Later on, Ted resumed his work in the Air Mail Service, although this time he chose the Rocky Mountain Division because it was the most dangerous and appealed to his spirit of adventure. On one occasion when his plane crashed he became lost in the wilderness, and it was only by a hair's breadth that he saved his life and again reached civilization.

Shortly afterward he was attracted by the contest to fly across the Pacific from San Francisco to Honolulu, and here he again won fresh laurels as the winner. It was at about this time also that he got a clue to the mystery of his parentage. His father had been falsely accused of murder and had died in prison before his innocence could be established. Ted set out to vindicate his father's memory.

Still later, Ted's friends, Paul Monet and Tom Ralston, made a trip to the West Indies in search of hidden treasure. When no news came of the adventurers Ted became worried and set out after them. He had exciting adventures with outlaws, and barely escaped with his life in a terrific hurricane.

He had scarcely returned home when he was called upon by Walter Hapworth to make a trip with him to Mexico. Here Ted was en-

trusted with a secret mission to a rebel chief that involved him in a series of dangerous adventures, so dangerous that at one time a rope was around his neck and he was about to be strung up by his enemies when rescue arrived in the nick of time.

Later, when again employed in the Air Mail Service, Ted had his coffee drugged just before he started on a flying trip. He was forced to bring his plane to earth and, while he was unconscious, the plane was robbed of its valuable mail. How Ted sought out the robbers, how later he embarked on a perilous non-stop flight from America to Australia with a passenger who later became a maniac and battled with him while above the ocean, these and a host of other thrilling adventures are narrated in the preceding volume of this series entitled: "Across the Pacific; or, Ted Scott's Hop to Australia."

Now to return to Ted, as, all unknowing of the plot that had been framed against him by Gale and Hardwick behind closed doors, he bent busily over his plane, grooming it for the great endurance flight on the morrow.

That flight was to be held under unusual conditions. Ordinarily two men were in each machine, one to relieve the other while each took a few hours sleep. But on the present occasion each plane was to hold only one man, the

pilot. He must keep awake or, failing this, give up the contest. So it was to be more than a test of planes. It was to be a test also of the stamina and vitality and determination of the individual contestant.

As the existing record was more than sixty-five hours, this meant over two days and a half would be required for staying in the air, if the record was to be broken. It was bound to be a gruelling experience.

But Ted Scott did not fear the test. If the plane itself behaved all right, he was confident that his superb physical condition would bring him out the winner. More than once he had gone without sleep for long periods. Besides, he knew that he could set his plane in such a course and under such perfect control that he could catch occasional catnaps that, even if momentary, would serve to relieve the tension.

"Here she is, Jackson," he said to one of the mechanics as he delivered the *Browning* into his keeping. "She's fit to fly for a man's life. Keep strict watch over her and don't let any one come near her till the starting time for the race comes."

"I'm on," replied Jackson. "If any one gets near this beauty, it will be over my dead body."

CHAPTER III

On the Wing

As Ted Scott ran up the steps of the Bromville House he heard voices on the porch raised in animated but friendly discussion.

"I tell you, Jed Shuman, the race is as good as over right now," Eben Browning was saying.

"Now, Eben, you're prejudiced," replied the other, an old fishing enthusiast who had made the Bromville House his stopping place for years. "I ain't saying that Ted ain't a wonder and all that, but it stands to reason he's going to be beat some time. It ain't in nature that he should win everything he takes a hack at."

"It's in Ted's nature, all right," declared Eben. "There ain't anything that walks on two feet who can beat that boy in anything. Has any one done it yet?"

"Not yet," admitted Jed. "But that ain't saying that nobody ever will. And there's some mighty good men entered in this race, and don't you forget it!"

"They may be good," agreed Eben. "Stands

to reason they wouldn't be going in if they weren't. But no matter how good they are, I've got money that says Ted is better."

"Now you're gitting me interested," said Jed, drawing a wallet from his pocket. "Just how much are you willing to risk in that matter, Eben?"

"I ain't much of a betting man as a rule," replied Eben, as he in turn produced his pocketbook. "But, by gum, I ain't going to let myself be bluffed by you, Jed Shuman, or—"

He stopped short and looked guilty as Charity, his wife, passed by. She stopped and looked at Eben severely as he strove hastily to return his wallet to his pocket.

"For the land's sake, Eben Browning," she said, "am I seeing you doing such a sinful thing as betting?"

"Just a little backing of opinion, Charity," said Eben shamefacedly. "Jed here thinks that Ted ain't going to win this race and he wants to make a little bet on it."

"Ted not going to win!" exclaimed Charity indignantly. "Jed Shuman, I thought you had more sense. You ought to lose your money, making a fool bet like that."

"That's what I think," put in Eben eagerly, while Jed grinned. "It would be a just punishment to take his money away from him. And I'll tell you what I'll do, Charity. I'll turn all

the winnings over to you. How is that?"

Charity visibly wavered.

"I can't think it's just right," she said reluctantly. "But if you want to bet, I don't suppose I can stop you. But I tell you right now that the winnings will go into the plate at church next Sunday."

Having thus salved her conscience, she passed on, and Jed and Eben exchanged winks.

"Now that being settled," said Jed, "just how much are you willing to put up?"

"Ten, anyway," replied Eben. "Twenty, if you like. But I feel kind of ashamed, Jed, to be betting on a sure thing."

"Don't let that worry you," replied Jed dryly. "Suppose we call it twenty and let it go at that."

"Suits me," declared Eben.

Ted had stood by with a grin on his face while the debate had been going on.

"I hope your confidence in me won't be misplaced, Dad," he said. "I sure want to see that twenty dollars go into the plate next Sunday."

"You will," Eben stated. "Don't know but what I was a bit hasty in promising it all to Charity," he added ruefully. "Might have promised her ten if I won and kept the rest for myself. Why did she have to come along just then, anyway?"

That night Ted Scott went to bed early and

slept for a good twelve hours so as to get a reserve of sleep for the arduous task to which he had set himself.

The contest was scheduled to begin at one o'clock the next afternoon, and at that hour an immense crowd was assembled on the flying field. Automobiles were parked around the edges of the field by the hundreds and all the roads leading to the town were black with people and vehicles of all kinds from old farm wagons to the latest types of motor cars.

Ted was on the field some time before noon so that he might have ample time to make one last inspection of his plane and look after his supplies.

"Any one been near the plane, Jackson?" he asked of his mechanic, as the machine was being trundled out of its hangar.

"Not a soul," replied Jackson. "I've been on the watch every minute without a wink of sleep all night. Wouldn't trust it to any one else."

"You're a brick," said Ted appreciatively. "Is there food enough to last through the contest? You know I gave you a free hand in getting everything that was needed."

"Well," said Jackson, checking off the items on his fingers as he went along, "there are two fried chickens, two quarts of concentrated soup, a dozen hard-boiled eggs, two quarts of coffee,

four gallons of water, a dozen assorted sandwiches, a dozen oranges, and—"

"That's enough," interrupted Ted, with a laugh, "if I go hungry on that, my appetite's bigger than I think it is. Now let's take a look at this beauty."

A careful examination convinced Ted that the machine had never been in better shape. To convince himself beyond a shadow of a doubt, he jumped into the cockpit and took a brief spin around the course.

"Works like a dream," was his verdict, as he came down and delivered the plane into the hands of Jackson. "I think, however, you'd better put in a little more gas. That reserve tank can hold a good many gallons yet."

Jackson looked a little dubious.

"It'll make the machine heavier," he said. "There's enough in now to keep you going for seventy hours, I've calculated."

"Just as well, though, to have a little extra margin," said Ted. "Fill the reserve tank to within three inches of the top."

Jackson set about complying with the directions, and just then Walter Hapworth and Paul Monet strolled up to Ted.

Both were true and tried friends of the young aviator. What Hapworth had done for Ted has already been told. Monet was a cultivated Frenchman, who had insisted on sharing in the

loan that had permitted Ted to go to flying school. Ted, on his part, had once saved Mr. Monet's life by dragging him out of the path of an onrushing plane and had helped rescue him later when on a West Indian trip.

Ted shook hands with both warmly.

"How are you feeling, Ted?" asked Paul Monet.

"Fine and fit," replied the young aviator. "Never in my life felt in better condition."

"Going to win our bets for us?" asked Mr. Hapworth, with a smile. "Paul and I have each risked a thousand on your coming through with another victory."

"I'll do my best," promised Ted. "I'd hate like thunder to have any of my friends lose because of their faith in me. Don't forget, though, that it's anything but a sure thing. A hundred things may happen that would turn the scale in favor of one or another. Every one of these fellows is a flier with a reputation. They're not to be sneezed at."

"Of course, chance enters in," admitted Walter Hapworth. "Just the same, I'm not going to lose any sleep over my bet. How about you, Paul?"

"I feel the same way," laughed Paul Monet. "Go in and win, Ted. We'll be—what is it you Americans say?—rooting for you."

In another part of the field Brewster Gale

and Hardwick were standing near the latter's machine.

"Have you got that thing we were talking about?" asked Gale, looking around to see that no one was listening.

"Surest thing you know," replied Hardwick in the same low tone. "And if I'm not greatly mistaken, it will do the trick."

"If it doesn't, I'm stung for a good bit of coin," growled Gale. "Since my talk with you yesterday I've picked up every bet I came across, and there have been many, for every fool in this town seems crazy to bet on Ted Scott. I figure that I stand to lose something like five thousand dollars if you don't make good."

"Don't let that worry you," said Hardwick confidently. "This thing I have in mind can be counted on as sure fire. You'll have a cramp in your fingers from counting your winnings."

"I hope so," returned Gale, "Though that fellow has such fool luck that I'm almost superstitious about him," he added. "No matter how tight a hole he gets into, somehow or other he seems to wriggle through."

"He won't do any wriggling through this time," declared Hardwick emphatically.

"Of course," suggested Gale, "you don't want to play that trick too soon. Give him a

chance to come to grief in some other way. He may smash, his plane may go back on him, or lots of other things may happen. Don't use the ace you have up your sleeve until it's seen that nothing else will do."

The time for the test was now approaching, and the police who were in charge of the field began to clear it and force the crowd to a safe distance from the runway. This was difficult, for the throng was immense, but it was accomplished at last and a comparative hush settled on the throng while all waited for the starter's signal.

The four contestants were called into the judges' stand and given their final instructions. The course was to be an oval one and the competitors were to keep in a general way in constant sight of the field. The chief condition was that they were to keep aloft under all circumstances. The moment any plane came down and touched the earth the pilot of that plane was out of the contest.

"And I'm sure I need not say," the chief judge, Albert Etterson, stated in concluding his instructions, "that any foul play on the part of any contestant will disqualify him at once. You are all good fliers and know the rules. I believe you are all gentlemen and sportsmen. That is all."

He bowed their dismissal and the fliers left the stand and repaired to their respective machines.

They drew lots for the order of starting and Ted Scott drew number four. Stinson was to go first, then Hardwick, then Bagley, with Ted taking off last.

The starter's pistol cracked and Stinson started down the runway. He gathered speed as he went and took off when he was about two-thirds of the way down the course. His heavily loaded plane faltered for a moment. The spectators were undecided as to whether it would go up or down. Then it slowly mounted into the air.

A cheer went up from the spectators as Stinson, at a height of about eight hundred feet, brought his plane to an even keel and began to follow the course marked out by the judges and indicated by pylons.

Hardwick came next and made his take-off when about halfway down the runway. Ted was somewhat surprised at that, and his only explanation was that Hardwick was traveling light, carrying far less gasoline than he ought if he expected to beat the record. This seemed strange. Did Hardwick count on something less than endurance in order to win the contest? He remembered having seen Brewster Gale

Ted's bitterest enemy, in earnest converse with Hardwick a short time before.

But he had little time to follow this train of thought, for now Bagley had wheeled his machine to the head of the runway and was ready for his start.

He had not gone far before it was evident that something was the matter, either with the machine or the pilot. The plane wobbled crazily from side to side and the spectators in consternation gave back from the ropes.

When half the distance had been covered, the machine rose from the ground. But instead of continuing its course, it turned almost at right angles and made straight for a group of hangars at one end of the field.

There was a shout of horror from the crowd that scattered in all directions. Straight as an arrow the plane made for one of the hangars.

There was a moment when it seemed that it might win clear of it.

But that hope vanished an instant later when the plane crashed into the structure and came to the ground in a broken and tangled mass!

CHAPTER IV

The Storm Breaks

For a moment, after the crash of Bagley's plane, the great throng was rooted to the spot, paralyzed by apprehension. Then there was a concerted rush to the place of the wreck, where they feared to find the pilot maimed or killed.

But a cheer went up when Bagley was seen to emerge from the wreckage and stand, though somewhat waveringly, upon his feet. There was a deep gash in the side of the face, from which blood was flowing freely, but he seemed to have sustained no mortal injury.

Ted Scott was one of the first to reach the scene of the disaster and he threw his arm about Bagley's shoulder, supporting him while with his handkerchief he sought to stanch the blood.

"Too bad, old man," said Ted sympathetically. "Any bones broken?"

"No, I think not," said Bagley faintly, trying to smile but making a failure of it. "But I'm pretty badly shaken up."

"How did it happen?" asked Ted, after shouting to some of the crowd to bring a doctor.

"Blest if I know," said Bagley. "Got dizzy and didn't seem to know what I was doing. Everything went black before me. Tried to hold control, but it got beyond me."

A doctor pushed his way through the crowd at the moment, to be followed an instant later by two others of the profession, and to them Ted committed his injured comrade.

A hasty but careful examination showed that no serious injuries had been sustained, although the shock would probably keep the aviator under the doctor's care for a few days to come. The unlucky man was carried from the field in an ambulance that had been summoned for the purpose, the débris of the wreck was cleared away, and the judges' signal called Ted to the head of the runway to take his turn.

Ted was considerably shaken by the accident, for Bagley was a good friend of his. He had met him during his work in the Mississippi Valley at the time of the flood and had had ample opportunity to learn his qualities of mind and heart. He knew how bitterly Bagley would mourn over the disaster that had put him out of the race, and he sympathized with him deeply.

The shot was fired and the *Browning* roared down the runway. Half the distance was covered without any sign of its lifting. Ted thought of the extra gasoline that he had di-

rected Jackson to put into the tank. Had that additional load made the plane too heavy to rise?

A little further on, and he felt the trembling of the gallant plane as it sought to leave the ground with its heavy burden. Still it would not lift.

The crowd watched breathlessly. The nerves of the spectators had already been severely tested by the first disaster. Were they to witness a second one that would involve their idol, Ted Scott, the master flier of all time?

And now three-quarters of the course had been covered. At the end of the field was a long line of telegraph and telephone wires. Ted knew that if he did not clear them he was lost. For at the terrific speed he had now attained, a collision with those wires would mean maiming or death.

Still he kept his nerve, and with hands as steady as a rock and brain as cool as ice he jockeyed the control while he murmured to the plane words of encouragement as though it had been a living thing.

At last the *Browning* lifted, rose slowly but steadily higher and higher, as though yielding to the indomitable will of its master.

Still the result hung in the balance, for now the wires were fearfully near. The crowd knew quite as well as the young avaitor that he was

gambling with death. Which would win in that terrible wager of which a human life was the stake?

Up and up the *Browning* went, on and on, closer to the wires. Then, at the last moment, it cleared the obstruction by such a narrow margin that Ted could feel the grazing of the wheels of the plane upon the topmost wire.

A tremendous shout of joy and relief rose like thunder from the great throng as the spectators saw the *Browning* hurdle the last obstacle and shoot like an arrow into the skies.

Ted mounted until he was a full thousand feet in the air. Then he pushed the joystick, brought the plane to an even keel, and joined the other two contestants as they journeyed around the course, taking care to keep at the distance prescribed by the rules of the contest.

Two people had not joined in the joyous acclamations that hailed Ted's escape from disaster.

One was Brewster Gale, who had watched breathlessly the threatened catastrophe. His eyes had lighted with savage delight as the collision with the wires had seemed inevitable. They clouded with sour displeasure at the outcome and his jaws clamped down so viciously on the cigar he was smoking that it was bitten in half.

"Just my luck!" he muttered malignantly.

"Why couldn't that fellow have broken his neck? It would have simplified matters and I'd have won all my bets. And it would have been mighty sweet to send the news to Greg and Duck."

Hardwick, also, from his lofty perch, noted Ted's narrow escape from catastrophe. He held his breath as Ted approached the wires and expelled that breath in a sigh of disappointment when he saw his rival clear the obstacle.

He cast a glance at several small peculiarly shaped articles that he had stowed in his fuselage.

"I'm afraid I'll have to use you after all," he muttered. "I was hoping that it wouldn't come to that. I'd like that two thousand that Brew has promised me, but I know well enough what risks I'll have to take to earn it."

Like three great birds the contending planes swooped up and down, to and fro, in the long-looked-for race that had now commenced.

Ted was in his element. He always felt more at home in the air than on the ground. He was a true bird of passage, and his friends had many a time told him jokingly that they would not be surprised to see him sprouting feathers.

His heart was filled with thankfulness at the fact that he was alive at all. But now that the danger had been overcome, he was glad that he had taken those extra gallons of gas. That

margin of fuel might spell the difference between victory and defeat.

With the young aviator's elation was blended a feeling of sadness that Bagley had fallen out of the race. To be sure, it was to Ted's advantage, as he had only two rivals to outlast now instead of three. But there was not a selfish bone in Ted Scott's body, and that consideration did not appeal to him in the slightest degree. He would far rather be beaten than owe victory to an accident to one of his competitors.

There was little that was spectacular to the spectators, now that the start had been made and the contestants had settled down to the steady grind that might last for the better part of two or three days. But there had been plenty of thrills in the take-offs, two of which had so nearly resulted in tragedy. In addition, the committee in charge of the arrangements had provided in another part of the field a series of stunts by well known fliers, loop the loops, barrel rolls, falling leaves, and other things to make the spectators gasp, as well as some parachute leaps from dizzy heights. So for two hours longer the crowd had its fill of excitement.

As darkness drew on, the throng began to disperse for supper and soon only a handful was left on the field. But the absence of many

was only temporary, and an hour or two later the field began to fill again. Gay parties came in automobiles, the lights from which seemed to Ted Scott, a thousand feet up in the sky, like so many fireflies. A band played popular airs in the stand and the sounds floated upward to the lonely voyagers in the dark abyss of space.

The three planes could scarcely have been discerned had it not been for a giant searchlight installed on the field that sent its beam sweeping across the sky and at intervals picked out each plane in a flood of brilliance. The markings on each plane stood out clearly, showing to whom it belonged, and as each came into view it was greeted with cheers from the partisans of that special pilot.

The cheers were hearty enough in each case, but when Ted's plane was discerned they became uproarious. There was no doubt in any one's mind as to who was the favorite of the crowd. Nine out of every ten were pinning their faith to Bromville's idol.

So far, all the planes had been doing well. The engines were working perfectly with the steady hum that is the sweetest music to the ears of an airman, and the machines were responding readily to the slightest touch of the helmsmen.

The gay sight below and the strains of the

band helped make the time pass quickly. Almost before he knew it, Ted saw by a glance at his clock that he had already been eight hours in the air. That at first sight seemed a lot. But it did not seem quite as much when the young aviator reflected that it was less than an eighth of the time he would have to stay in the air if he were to break the record.

Then gradually silence seemed to come down like a cloak over the field. The musicians packed up their instruments and stole away to where bed awaited them. The automobiles began to wind their way out of the gates. Soon only a few spectators were left, and these were friends or backers of the contestants in the race, who were loth to lose sight of their favorites. Only in the judges' stand, where the referees took turns, so that some of them were always on hand, was there any sign of life and activity. From time to time the searchlight moved across the sky, but lazily.

The three planes in the sky could scarcely be said to be company for each other. From time to time as they passed Ted would wave his hand to Stinson and receive a cordial wave in return. Once, out of good nature, Ted waved to Hardwick, but as that aviator only looked at him gloweringly and made no motion in return, Ted from that time forth left him alone.

There was no moon, but the stars were out,

and Ted killed time by studying them as they lay like glittering jewels against the black velvet of the heavens. To a certain extent he felt himself akin to them. They, like himself, were engulfed in space, removed far from the noise and bustle of the world. Many a time they had been his only companions as he had winged his way in the silent watches of the night over hill and valley, desert and ocean.

After a time he was deprived even of these. One by one they went out as though an extinguisher had blotted out their brilliance. Before long all had disappeared and in their stead black masses of cloud piled themselves threateningly over the vault of the heavens.

A storm was menacing. Blacker and blacker grew the sky, relieved only by jagged flashes of lightning that were followed by peals of thunder.

Suddenly Ted felt as though some one had dealt him a heavy blow in the back of the neck and his plane turned almost upside down!

CHAPTER V

Foul Play

The impact of the gale was so terrific that for a few moments the plane was tossed about like a chip on the surface of a cataract.

But Ted Scott had had that happen to him before, and with a few dexterous movements of the control he brought the plane to an even keel and prepared to battle with the tempest.

The rain was coming now in torrents and dashed against the windows of the cockpit, obscuring the pilot's vision and making it almost impossible for Ted to see twenty feet ahead of him.

If he had been alone in the skies, this would not have bothered him greatly. With unlimited space before him he would have brought the plane about so that the wind would be on her back or her quarter and let her drive.

But there were his two companion planes, confined by the rules of the contest to certain definite limits. If any one should come in contact with another it would mean that both would probably be dashed to earth like birds with broken wings, and, in that tragic contingency,

it was not hard to imagine the fate that awaited the pilots.

Deprived of sight to a great extent, the airmen would have to depend on their ears and be guided by the roaring of the motors. But even this was apt to be drowned out by the roar of the thunder, which had now become almost continuous.

Twice in the course of the next few minutes Ted Scott saw great shapes loom up before him, and only by lightning-like management of the controls was he able to avoid a collision.

This was intolerable. The daring aviator pulled his joystick and mounted like a meteor to the height of two thousand feet.

He had scarcely reached that level when a terrific shock shook the *Browning* from stem to stern. The plane rocked and quivered as though it had received a mortal blow. At the same moment the plane was suffused with a blinding light and a great ball of fire ran along the motor.

Ted knew at once what had happened. Lightning had struck the plane!

The ball of fire bounded from the motor to the wing and ran its entire length before it fell into the abyss of space.

Ted Scott's heart almost stopped beating. His first thought was of the motor. Had it been put out of commission? If so, only two

alternatives were left to him. He would have to try to volplane to the ground or, in the last resort, jump with his parachute. In either event he would have lost the contest.

Then his eyes flew to the wing. If that had been deeply burned by the molten flame that had run along it, the result would be equally disastrous.

For what seemed an age he looked and listened. But the motor still kept up its steady hum without a knock and, scan the wing as he did, he could detect nothing like the scarlet thread of fire that he expected and dreaded to see.

A great sigh of relief broke from him as he became convinced that his fears were without foundation.

For more than two hours the storm raged in all its fury. Then gradually the rain subsided to a drizzle, the lightning ceased to flash across the sky, and the thunder retreated grumblingly into its distant caverns. The storm was over.

One by one the stars began to peep through the rifts of the clouds and soon the whole sky was ablaze with light, for now the moon had joined the heavenly host and the plane was floating in what seemed to be a sea of molten silver.

Now that the strain was past, Ted realized that he was ravenously hungry. He had been

just about to break his fast when the storm had come up. But in that fierce struggle with elemental forces he had lost all thought of food.

He feasted on cold chicken and some sandwiches and supplemented this with hot coffee from a thermos bottle. The food put new vigor into him and the coffee dispelled any desire to sleep. He felt as vital and wide awake as he had when he started on his flight.

He wondered how his rivals had fared. He hoped they had come off as well as himself. He wanted to win, but he would far rather lose than owe his victory to an accident. Every drop of blood in that stalwart body of his was sporting blood.

He pushed the joystick and the *Browning* dropped from its two-thousand-foot level to one of a thousand feet. The moon made everything almost as bright as day, and before long he could detect the two other planes floating like his own in immensity. He had expected this, for both Stinson and Hardwick were experienced pilots to whom storms were a part of the day's work.

The long night wore on. Then the darkness gradually gave way to a shimmering of pearl, streaks of crimson appeared on the horizon, and at last the sun burst forth in all its splendor.

With the new day Ted Scott felt a sudden

inrush of joyous vitality. The air was crisp and sweet. It was good to be alive. He waved to Stinson and the latter responded. Hardwick kept his eyes averted and his face was glum and sour.

"That face would curdle milk," Ted thought. "It must be sweet to have such an ingrowing disposition."

One thing he noted that seemed to him queer. That was that Hardwick kept coming closer to him than the rules of the contest allowed. At times it seemed almost as though he would graze Ted's plane. Twice Ted had to shout to him a warning and motion him to sheer off.

If Hardwick's plane had been somewhat out of control, perhaps as a result of the storm, Ted could have understood his actions. But he noticed that when Hardwick was at a distance the plane maneuvered perfectly, responding to every movement of the stick. And if the plane was all right, Hardwick was too skillful a pilot not to be able to gauge distance correctly.

Ted had seen horse races where crooked jockeys had endeavored to crowd their opponents off the course, get them in a pocket, crowd them against a fence, or in some other way put them at a disadvantage. Hardwick seemed to be adopting similar tactics, with no end in view

as far as Ted could see except to rattle his opponent and perhaps impel him to make some false move that would end in disaster.

He noted, too, that Hardwick's attention seemed to be centered on Ted alone. He kept his distance from Stinson and made no attempt to interfere with him. Was he trying to frazzle Ted's nerves so that he would not be at his best, on the theory that dripping water will at last wear away a stone?

"If that's his game, he's picked out the wrong victim," muttered Ted to himself, with a grim tightening of his lips.

He breakfasted heartily and blessed Jackson mentally for the variety of toothsome food that his assistant had procured for him.

As the morning wore on, the field began again to be dotted with people. Again the lively strains of the band broke out and a general air of festivity prevailed. By noon the crowd had swelled from hundreds to thousands, most of whom had brought their lunches with them, prepared to make holiday while they calculated on the chances of the fliers.

Nothing had occurred as yet to dim the hopes of any of the rooters. To all appearances, each of the contestants was doing well and seemed to have sustained no damage from the violent storm of the night before.

At the height at which Ted Scott was flying, it

was impossible for the unaided eye to distinguish individuals on the ground. But Ted had brought with him a powerful pair of field glasses, and with these he was able to discern faces clearly.

Many of his friends he made out, for practically everybody in town was his friend, ready to stick by him through thick and thin.

But there was one there of quite a different kind.

Brewster Gale was standing apart, chewing nervously on a big cigar. Ted could see that the heavy-jowled face was clouded with a frown that made his saturnine features uglier than over.

"Hasn't got over his disappointment at not seeing me break my neck yesterday," chuckled Ted to himself. "It's too bad I couldn't see my way clear to please such a good friend of mine."

Then he looked a little more closely. Gale seemed to be making signals. But to whom?

Ted looked about at Stinson and Hardwick. The former was attending strictly to flying and his eyes were bent on his controls. But Hardwick, who held the stick with his left hand, had taken a handkerchief from his pocket and was making queer motions with it that seemed to be spelling letters or indicating words.

Ted looked again through his glasses at Gale.

The latter also had his handkerchief in his hand and was moving it unobtrusively to and fro. But there was method in those movements.

For five minutes, perhaps, this persisted, and then the silent conversation, if such it was, ended. Hardwick again bent to his controls and Gale resumed his slow walk up and down the field.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Ted asked himself wonderingly.

His curiosity was piqued. Why this mysterious signaling? What was there of such importance that such an unusual system of wigwagging had to be employed regarding it?

He knew that both were his enemies. Hardwick's sneering talk to his friends had shown the way the older airman regarded him. Gale's bitter hostility of course was notorious. He remembered how Hardwick had been maneuvering with his plane in defiance of the rules of the course. Was there something brewing? Was there a plot afoot that had him, Ted Scott, as its object?

He shrugged his shoulders and put the thought into the back of his mind. He would cross that bridge when he came to it. In the meantime he would keep on the alert.

On and on he flew until it was mid-afternoon. Then he became conscious that the monotonous roaring of the motors of the three planes had

decreased in volume. It was as though in the music of a trio one of the instruments had suddenly stopped.

He cast a swift glance at Hardwick. His plane was moving as usual. Ted turned his eyes toward Stinson. His motor had ceased and the plane was wobbling crazily.

"His engine has gone dead!" Ted exclaimed to himself, with a throb of sympathy.

That conviction became certainty a moment later when Stinson swept his plane around in a wide circle and began to volplane in long spirals to the ground.

There was a great shout from the spectators and a wild scattering to get out of the way of the descending plane.

Lower and lower it dropped, magnificently handled by the unlucky aviator, until it touched the ground. It ran along for a few hundred feet before it came to a stop, and Stinson, trying to smile, game fellow as he was, stepped out.

He had lost! He was out of the race!

Now only two were left, Ted Scott and Hardwick. The contest had ceased to be a three-cornered one. It had become a duel.

The happening, unfortunate as it was, had provided a high spot in the interest felt by the spectators, and as the news spread the crowd of new arrivals grew greater. All through the rest of the afternoon and evening speculation

continued at fever heat and lasted far into the night. It was long after midnight before the bulk of the throng had dispersed.

With the coming of night, weariness also fell upon the two contestants. The strain of the long struggle began to tell. It grew harder and harder to keep tired eyelids from drooping over tired eyes.

It may have been about three o'clock in the morning when Ted, speeding along over the course mechanically, became suddenly conscious that Hardwick, instead of flying on the same general level, had risen abruptly into the skies and, as Ted could tell from the roar of the motor, was almost directly overhead.

Then something dropped in front of the *Browning* and there was the sound of something breaking.

The next instant Ted was coughing, sneezing, sputtering, choking, his head reeling, his brain in a whirl!

CHAPTER VI

A Rascal Foiled

Startled beyond all words, dizzy and bewildered, Ted Scott strove to hold possession of his fast vanishing senses.

The shock had caused his hands to drop from the control and the leaderless plane careened at a perilous angle and threatened to turn turtle. His eyes were so blinded that even the closest objects could scarcely be discerned.

What had happened? Had he been gassed? The whole fuselage was full of swirling ribbons of what looked like smoke, and acrid fumes assailed his nostrils, biting into the membranes of mouth and throat, seeming to contract the air passages so that it required a tremendous effort to force a breath through.

Ted tore his handkerchief from his pocket and wound it about his nose and mouth to keep out the choking fumes. This done, he grasped the control firmly, checked the rearing of the plane and brought it once more under his command.

He put on extra power and darted out of the zone in which he found himself, trusting to

the swifter breeze he thus awakened to sweep through the fuselage and drive out the noxious fumes.

Gradually the atmosphere immediately about him cleared somewhat and his laboring lungs could breathe with less difficulty. The smarting of his eyes caused him agony. He felt as though they had been seared with a hot iron. He saw everything as through a veil.

He had been so engrossed with these efforts for self-preservation that he had had no time to reach a clear conclusion as to the cause of this sudden catastrophe. His head was reeling so from the effects of the insidious fumes that his brain had not been able as yet to function properly.

Dimly the idea came to him that he had perhaps passed through the tail of a comet. He knew that those rare visitants from the skies sometimes carried more or less pungent fumes in their train.

Yet in that case there would have been some indication of light. And there had been nothing of that kind. The darkness had remained unbroken.

He was still trying in his dizzy brain to piece together some explanation of the mystery when again there came a soft plop, as might have been occasioned by the bursting open of an orange squeezed tightly in the hand, and again

a cloud of vapor with the same choking, acrid qualities of the first invaded the plane.

This time, however, thanks to the bandage over his mouth and nose, Ted was comparatively immune save for the blinding effect upon his eyes.

He pulled the joystick and shot upward to escape the infernal gases, and as he did so he caught sight dimly of Hardwick's plane hovering at some distance above him.

Then the whole infamous plot burst upon him. It was Hardwick who had done this, dropped those deadly missiles cunningly timed to burst open in the vicinity of Ted's plane!

Even as this certainty came upon him he saw Hardwick lean over the side of his plane and release what seemed to be a small black ball.

Ted swerved to one side and the object passed on harmlessly to the depths below.

A savage rage took possession of Ted Scott. His first impulse was to drive straight at the scoundrel and send his plane hurtling to the earth.

But that would have involved his own destruction, too, and he mastered himself. The essential thing for the moment was to get up above Hardwick's plane so as to check any further attempt to destroy the *Browning*. There was no knowing how many other missiles the

rascal might have provided himself with in order to carry out his purpose.

So Ted shot upward. But Hardwick divined his purpose and himself darted up toward the skies, determined at any costs to get the upper hand.

Then ensued a jockeying with the rival planes that lasted for nearly half an hour. But skillful as Hardwick was in managing his machine, he was not in the same class as Ted Scott when it came to airmanship, and finally the latter so established his supremacy that Hardwick gave up the struggle.

He dropped to a lower level and again began moving in the stipulated course as though nothing had happened. Ted also let himself down to a lower stratum of air, but took care always to maintain an upper position.

Ted was still suffering from the poisonous fumes. The quickness with which he had enveloped his nose and mouth had alone proved his salvation. As it was, his eyes were smarting terribly and the sensitive membranes of his throat felt as though they had been rasped by a file. But the dizziness had cleared away from his brain and he was in full possession of his senses.

He had heard and read of foul play in contests of skill where rivalry was intense, but he had never believed that rivalry could be car-

ried so far as to lead to an attempt like this.

The recollection of Gale's conference with Hardwick on the field, of the later wigwagging with handkerchiefs, flashed across Ted's mind. He had long known that Gale was capable of anything. This proved it.

Had Ted crashed to earth from that height, he would certainly have been killed. He would have had no chance to tell his story. It would have been attributed to a lamentable accident, one of the tragedies of which the history of aviation is so full. Hardwick would have been the sole survivor of the contest and would have carried off the prize, and Gale's revenge would have been glutted to the full.

The more Ted Scott cogitated over the horrible plot, the more wrath seethed within him. Now he would have to be on the alert every moment of the time against a further attempt to put him out of the contest. There was no knowing what other ace Hardwick might have up his sleeve, now that this attempt had failed.

Yet there was nothing that could be done, for the moment at least. Ted might, of course, have written a note to the judges and dropped it to the ground, giving the details of the attack. Probably in that case the race would have been halted, the pilots called to the ground and confronted with each other.

But Ted Scott did not care to do this. In

the first place, it was his habit to settle his own quarrels. Then, too, he had no real proof that would be conclusive. There were no witnesses. Hardwick would deny the whole thing point-blank. It would be simply the word of one man against another. And there would not be wanting those, especially among Hardwick's backers, who would claim that Ted, feeling that for some reason he was about to lose the race, was simply concocting the story to deprive Hardwick of his victory.

No, the race must go on. But Ted vowed to himself that when the contest was over he would have his own private settlement with the scoundrel.

It was with a feeling of relief that Ted Scott welcomed the first streaks of dawn. Through the day there would be little chance for crooked work on Hardwick's part. There would be too many eyes looking upward.

Two nights now had been passed in the air. There was probably only one more to come. By one o'clock on the day just breaking the contestants would have been in the air for forty-eight hours. If they stayed there till twenty-five minutes past six the next morning they would have tied the record. Whatever they did after that would be "velvet."

Physically, Ted was very tired. He had drawn heavily on his store of vitality. But

mentally he had never been so keen and alert. Every nerve was tingling. The attack of Hardwick had driven from him all thoughts of sleep. To that extent it had proved a boomerang. The rascal had unwittingly helped his rival.

Ted reached out for a sandwich that lay near his hand and was about to bite into it when he was struck by something odd in its appearance.

It seemed to be covered with a light greenish film. Ted put it to his nostrils and smelled the same acrid odor that had so nearly been his undoing the night before.

He dropped it as though it had been redhot. Then he hastily examined his other stores of food. Practically all had the same film and the same odor.

Ted grasped at once the situation. His food supplies had been ruined!

Some noxious element in those gases had spread over every eatable in the plane. Whether it was actually poisonous, capable of causing death, Ted did not know. But he knew that it was capable of causing serious sickness at the very least, and all the money in the world would not have tempted him to taste the tainted food.

Here was a serious situation. He was already exceedingly hungry. There was a gnawing void in his stomach that called out clamorously for relief. Yet no relief would be

possible for the next twenty-four hours, if he stayed in the air that long.

There was just one little bit of silver lining to the cloud. His thermos bottle of coffee had been tightly closed, the top screwed on so carefully that he was sure none of the fumes could have penetrated it.

He unscrewed the cap and smelled and tasted the contents. There was no trace of the acrid odor. He took a draught of coffee and felt refreshed.

His first impulse was to toss overboard all of the tainted supplies. But the fear that some of it might be picked up by a child or even by an animal prowling for food restrained him. Besides, in case of need, that greenish film might serve him well in corroboration of his story.

So he took a notch in his belt and faced the necessity of hunger for a full day to come. After all, it meant no serious hardship, provided he did not grow dizzy and lightheaded and thus have his judgment obscured in the management of his plane.

He tapped his tanks to see how his gasoline supply was holding out. There was plenty, he figured, to last him till the end of the contest.

As he sailed around the course he caught a glimpse of Hardwick indulging in a hearty meal. It was a tantalizing sight and Ted's

pangs of hunger were redoubled. Also, his determination to have a full settlement with the scoundrel when opportunity should offer grew in force and intensity.

The morning wore on and again the field welcomed a great concourse of spectators. The fact that the contest had endured so long gave promise of the record being equaled or eclipsed and excitement grew in consequence.

About an hour before noon Ted through his glasses again saw Gale appear upon the field. He followed his movements carefully. Would the wigwagging of the previous day be renewed?

He was not kept long in doubt. Out came Gale's handkerchief, and as Ted glanced at Hardwick he saw that the latter had already withdrawn his. A moment later the two confederates were exchanging signals.

"Bet Gale is asking him why in thunder he didn't put me out of commission last night," Ted chuckled to himself.

Something of that kind seemed indeed to be the subject of the silent conversation, for Ted could see that Gale's face was like a thundercloud. There was petulance and anger in every movement of Gale's arm while there seemed to be a certain apologetic touch in Hardwick's responses.

The signals terminated abruptly. Gale

jammed his handkerchief into his pocket, pulled his hat down over his brow, threw his cigar down on the ground and stamped upon it viciously.

A little time afterward Ted noticed that Hardwick seemed to be having trouble with his plane. It no longer moved about so smoothly as it had been doing, but wavered and jerked as though in sympathy with some perturbation of the pilot.

Ted snatched up his glasses and took a good look at his rival. He saw that Hardwick's face was as pale as death and that he was doubled up as though in pain.

Then, to his utter amazement, Ted saw that Hardwick was pointing the nose of his plane downward. He looked for him to straighten it out again on a lower level. Then he realized that Hardwick was moving in downward spirals, the sure precursor of an attempt to land.

There was no mistake about it. Hardwick was going to land. He was giving up the race!

CHAPTER VII

When Rogues Fall Out

Ted Scott could scarcely believe his eyes. Was his victory already assured?

For a moment the thought came to him that Hardwick was perhaps indulging in a joke at his expense and at the last moment would again soar aloft and resume his course.

But that thought vanished a moment later when he saw the crowd scattering to get out of the way as Hardwick neared the ground.

The plane touched the earth, ran a few hundred feet, and came to a stop. There was no mistake then. Hardwick was through!

A tumult of shouts burst from the spectators, shouts of surprise at the unexpected descent, shouts of triumph from those who had backed Ted to win the endurance contest.

The multitude broke for the plane, which was soon only a white spot in the milling crowd. Ted looked to see Hardwick emerge from the cockpit at once. But a full two minutes elapsed before his rival appeared and laboriously descended to the ground, helped by some of the spectators.

What had caused the sudden collapse? Scurvily as Hardwick had acted toward him, Ted Scott felt sorry that he had been taken ill. He would have much preferred to have had the contest fought out to a finish on the issue simply of nerve and skill and excellence in airmanship. He did not want accident or sickness to figure in his victory.

Still, the fact remained that he was victor. He could have descended to the ground at once and claimed the prize. But he still had another rival to conquer—old Father Time!

Was the record to remain over the sea? Were the foreigners to plume themselves over the fact that they had a record that American airmen had not been able to equal? Not if Ted Scott knew it!

So he braced himself for the effort. The pains of hunger still gnawed at him and promised to become keener with every passing hour. But his heart was so elated that he cared little for anything else.

It was a great satisfaction to reflect that all the friends who had backed him had won their wagers. Eben, Walter, Monet, Mark, Jack, Breck, Bill! Good old scouts! Their confidence in him had not been misplaced.

A great weight, too, had been lifted from his mind. He would no longer have to be on the watch against an assassin that struck in the

dark. The only foes he might have to grapple with now were natural ones, storm, fog, a mishap to his plane. He had so often met and conquered these that he had little fear of the result.

He looked down again at the ground. The crowd had scattered now, and Hardwick was moving along with difficulty, supported on the arm of Gale. The latter was leading his confederate to his own automobile, parked on the south end of the field.

"Birds of a feather," murmured Ted to himself. "It would be interesting to hear what they talk about. I'll bet Gale is savage enough to bite nails.'"

What Gale and Hardwick had to talk about was plenty. But not a word was exchanged in the automobile, for fear the conversation would be overheard by the chauffeur.

They waited until they had reached Gale's private room in the Hotel Excelsior. There Hardwick slumped down heavily into a chair while Gale slammed the door to with a bang. Then the older man turned viciously on his accomplice.

"Of all the wretched bunglers—" he began.

"Now cut that right out, Brew Gale," returned Hardwick, straightening up. "It won't get you anywhere to take that tone with me. There was no bungling on my part. I did that perfectly. It was just a case of hard luck."

"Hard luck!" sneered Gale. "That's what every one says when he falls down on his job. That alibi won't go with me. You've done me out of five thousand dollars in bets. That money would have been in the bag, if you'd done your work right. Hard luck! Tell that to the marines. When I went out to the grounds this morning I expected to find Ted Scott out of the race. More than that, I hoped to find his plane a wreck and he himself maimed or killed. Did I find what I had a right to expect? I did not. There he was, sailing along as fine as silk. And there he is at this minute, laughing his head off at the way he's got the best of us. Those gas bombs were sure fire, if you had used them right. Why didn't you?"

"I did my best," declared Hardwick sullenly.

"If that's your best, I wonder what your worst could have been?" snarled Gale.

"I tell you I calculated the thing to a dot," said Hardwick hotly. "I got right over his plane and dropped the thing so that it burst right in front of the nose of his machine. It came near to doing the business right there and then. The plane almost turned turtle before he could right it. But some way or other his fool luck was with him and he managed to keep his senses."

"You had a dozen other bombs," snapped

Gale. "What was the matter with using them? One of them would have been sure to have got him."

"I did try another, and that caught him just right, too," protested Hardwick. "But he must have been leary then of my doing that thing, and he got out of the danger zone like a streak of lightning."

"That accounts for two," snapped Gale. "Even then you had ten left."

"Yes," admitted Hardwick. "But I didn't get a chance to use them. I tried to keep above him. But every time I shot up I found out that he'd managed to get higher."

"And you call yourself an airman," grunted Gale, with biting sarcasm.

"It's no disgrace to be beaten by Ted Scott," growled Hardwick. "There isn't a man in the world that can give that bird points in flying a plane. I had to give it up for the time, but I figured that I'd have another chance to-night. And I would, too, if I hadn't been taken sick."

"If you were sick, I'll bet it was because you'd smuggled some bum whiskey into the plane."

"Nothing of the kind!" declared Hardwick. "I haven't had a drop. It must have been one of the sandwiches I had eaten. I thought it tasted queer, but I was hungry, and it was only when I went to pick up a second one that I saw

there was a little green film over it. Then I remembered that one of the bombs had gone off just after it left my hand. Some of the acid must have been spattered on the sandwiches and I hadn't noticed it."

"Rank carelessness!" snapped Gale. "If you'd been worth your salt, you would have noticed it. I'll bet Ted Scott wouldn't have overlooked a thing like that. Well, I've simply backed the wrong horse. I thought you were good and I find that you're rotten."

"Say that again and I'll knock your head off, sick as I am," Hardwick flared up.

"I'll say it as often as I like! You've lost me a pot of money, and I'm not going to take it lying down. There's one satisfaction, though. You've lost the two thousand dollars I promised you."

"Oh, no I haven't," said Hardwick coolly. "You're going to come across with every one of those two thousand berries."

"You're crazy!" he snorted.

"Crazy as a fox," replied Hardwick. "Do you suppose for a minute that I'd take the risk I did and get nothing out of it? If you do, you've got another think."

"Try and get it," sneered Gale.

"Easiest thing in the world," replied Hardwick imperturbably. "You'd rather cough up than go to jail, wouldn't you?"

"You mean you're going to peach, do you? You'd only be giving yourself away. You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire."

"Not exactly," was the answer. "You've got to live in this town. I don't have to. You've got more to lose than I have. What is to hinder me at this moment from going to the judges and telling them the whole story? How long would it be before they'd swear out a warrant for your arrest?"

"You'd be cutting off your nose to spite your face," Gale retorted. "You'd be arrested too."

"Grant it," replied Hardwick calmly. "Then I'd offer to turn state's evidence against you. I'd get off and you'd be jugged. Now do I get those two thousand berries?"

CHAPTER VIII

Smashing the Record

Brewster Gale glared at Hardwick in impotent rage. He saw that the other held the winning hand. He knew that he had already many enemies in Bromville who would be ready to believe Hardwick's story. He knew also the wave of popular rage that would rise against him at the infamous attempt against Ted Scott, the idol of his townsmen.

"Blackmail, eh?" he sneered, biting his lip until it bled.

"Call it anything you like," returned Hardwick carelessly. "It's the money for me or the jug for you. Take your choice."

Gale took out his checkbook and his fountain pen and began to write.

In the meantime Ted Scott had been serenely pursuing his course. The weather was perfect and the *Browning* was working beautifully, justifying to the full the confidence that Ted had placed in her. From time to time a great cheer would rise from the field, expressive of encouragement in Ted's attempt to break the record, the only task that yet remained to him.

His thoughts returned to the attack of the previous night. What ought he to do in the matter when he returned to the ground? Go to the judges and tell his story?

That, he knew, would probably cause Hardwick to be brought face to face with him. Then there would be the charge and the denial. Hardwick would undoubtedly try to lie out of it. It would be the word of one man against another. There, of course, would be the evidence of the tainted food. But Hardwick could say that Ted had poisoned it himself in order to satisfy a grudge against his rival.

There might be a probability strong enough to justify Hardwick's arrest. But when it came to the actual trial Ted would need some corroboration, some witness. He had no witness. The upshot would be that Hardwick would go free, might indeed institute an action against Ted for false arrest.

Then, too, if Hardwick were placed under arrest, Ted would lose his chance of punishing Hardwick physically. He would rather thrash him than jail him. His hands itched to get at the rascal.

No, he would make no official complaint. On the other hand, he would make no effort to keep it secret from his friends and acquaintances.

The day passed and melted into night. Again a host of autos with their lights twinkling like

fireflies! Again the stirring strains of the band to relieve the strain! Again the crowds that cheered vociferously every time the searchlight sweeping across the sky revealed the plane and its pilot!

But the young aviator would have exchanged all the cheers in the world just then for a good meal. Even the last drop of coffee had now gone down his throat. He was faint and dizzy from hunger and from lack of sleep.

Midnight came and passed. Now he was on the last lap. But because it was the last it seemed the hardest and the longest. If he could only keep awake and afloat until twenty-five minutes past six! One minute after that he would have broken the record, brought it back to America, set up a new mark for the ambitious aviators of the world to shoot at!

Two o'clock! Three o'clock! Four o'clock!

How terribly the minutes dragged! How hungry he was! And, oh, so unutterably weary!

His eyelids felt as heavy as lead. Again and again they fell down over his eyes, those eyes that were burning now for lack of sleep as well as still smarting from the effects of the gas.

Five o'clock! Only an hour and twenty-five minutes now. But that seemed like an eternity.

The minute hand moved so slowly over the face of the clock on his instrument board that he sometimes told himself it must have stopped.

At times he had to lift his eyelids with his hands. He could not open them simply by the power of his will.

Five-thirty! Six! Only twenty-five minutes more!

He stamped his feet upon the floor to keep himself awake. He punched himself in the face with his fist. It would be tragedy now to fall asleep.

Yet fall asleep, it seemed, he must.

"I mustn't! I mustn't!" he kept repeating desperately to himself.

At a snail's pace the hand crept across the clock's face. Now it was ten minutes past—no, only nine. He was seized with a frantic impulse to push the hand along by main force.

Fifteen minutes! Twenty! Five more to go!

Twenty-one minutes! Twenty-two! When would it mark twenty-three? Surely the clock had really stopped this time. No, it was still ticking. Twenty-three! Twenty-four!

Twenty-five! He had equaled the record!

Twenty-six! He had surpassed it!

From the field below rose a stupendous burst of cheering that seemed as though it would never stop. For all had known as well as Ted Scott himself what the record was and just the moment that would be reached when it was equaled—the moment, too, when it was broken.

That burst of cheers put new life and vigor into Ted's veins. All else was forgotten. Weariness and hunger dropped away from him as though by magic, a striking proof of the power of mind over matter.

He had succeeded! He had done what he had set out to do! He had brought back the title to his beloved country! He had justified the faith of his friends! He sang aloud, whistled, behaved for a few minutes like a madman.

With this new influx of energy he determined to make his victory as striking as possible.

He tested his tanks. He figured that he could remain in the air several hours longer. He would fight it out to the last gallon of gas.

He did. It was not till eleven o'clock, more than four hours beyond the previous record, that the almost bare condition of his tanks told him that he must fly down unless he wanted to fall down. Then with one glance around the course he had been traveling for seventy hours he turned the nose of his plane toward the earth and landed so easily and gracefully that the plane would scarcely have broken a pane of glass.

As it ran along toward a stop the crowd ran with it, and it was in an indescribable tumult of cheers and shouts that Ted, wan and haggard, stepped from the cockpit.

But his feet did not touch the ground, for

he was caught and hoisted on the shoulders of Mark and Jack and Breck and Bill, who bore him along to the judges' stand, making their way with the greatest difficulty through the throng that sought to get near its hero.

When the judges could make themselves heard, they gave the successful young aviator their hearty congratulations and formally awarded to him the prize of five thousand dollars.

Ted listened almost mechanically, his head in a daze from hunger and weariness. With a brief word of thanks he thrust the check into his pocket as carelessly as though it had been any ordinary scrap of paper. He appreciated money as much as did any normal human being, but the check was far less important to him than the fact that he had won and brought the world's record back to America.

His first thought was to press his way through the crowd to where he had left the plane. Jackson was there, his mouth widened into a broad smile.

"Take good care of her, Jackson," said Ted. "She's behaved beautifully, and I can't thank you enough for the care you took in preparing her for the race. I'll be round to look her over to-morrow and see how well she's stood the strain. For the present all I can think of is wrapping myself around a good big meal."

"Why," replied Jackson in some surprise, "I thought I put in plenty of grub before you started."

"So you did and more than enough," explained Ted. "But something happened to it that made it unfit to eat. I haven't had a crumb since yesterday morning. And one thing, Jackson, don't throw this food away. It's poisonous. Burn every scrap of it. I'd put on gloves before I handled it. Tell you all about it tomorrow."

He was off, leaving the mechanic staring after him with mouth agape, the picture of bewilderment.

Walter Hapworth and Mr. Monet, together with Eben and Charity Browning, took possession of the young aviator and carried him off in Mr. Hapworth's automobile to the Bromville House. In a trice an abundant meal was spread, upon which Ted fell hungrily.

Eben was radiant with delight and Charity was aglow with pride as she bustled around, seeing that Ted had the best of everything.

"Got the best of Jed Shuman!" chuckled Eben, slapping his thigh with gusto. "Guess he won't be so brash in making fool bets after this."

"He ought to have known that Ted would win," put in Charity loyally.

"Sure he ought," agreed her husband.

"That twenty looks mighty juicy to me. Let's see, Charity, didn't I say that I'd give you half of it if I won?"

"You said you'd give me the whole of it, Eben Browning, and you know that right well," Charity retorted. "And that whole twenty goes into the plate next Sunday. Mebbe, though," she added, "I'll give it to the Ladies' Aid Society for a new carpet for the Sunday school room. The old one's pretty near wore out."

"You're almost as good a platter polisher as you are an aviator, Ted," laughed Hapworth. "You sure are putting away that food with neatness and dispatch."

"And so would you," retorted Ted, with a grin, "if you'd been without a scrap of food for thirty hours or thereabouts."

"How was that?" asked Paul Monet, in surprise. "So interested in your work that you forgot to eat?"

"Nothing like that," replied Ted. "But I wasn't keen to fill my system with poison."

Then, as his auditors looked their bewilderment, he told them all the details of Hardwick's scoundrelly attack on him. They listened with growing wrath and indignation.

"My dear boy!" Charity gasped. "Thank the good Lord that you weren't killed!"

"I'd like to have my hands on that fellow's throat," growled Eben huskily.

"It's abominable!" ejaculated Mr. Monet.

"Infamous!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth. "The fellow ought to be arrested. He's a murderer—in intent at least."

"He's all of that," agreed Ted. "But after all he was only a tool. Ten to one he wouldn't have thought of anything of the kind if Gale hadn't put him up to it."

"That fellow, Gale, is a blot on the community," declared Walter. "He ought to be driven out of town."

"Unfortunately, I don't suppose we can reach him," said Ted thoughtfully. "I have a moral certainty that he was in it up to the neck, but that wouldn't be legal proof in a court of law. He could simply deny it, as of course he would, and defy me to prove it. That I couldn't do."

"Well, there's some satisfaction in the fact that he's lost heavily on the contest," remarked Walter. "I understand he's been taking every bet he could get in town."

"Thought he had a sure thing, if Hardwick's work went through," commented Mr. Monet. "I've won a thousand dollars on this contest, thanks to you, Ted, and I'd gladly give every cent of it to see that scoundrel put behind the bars."

"Same here," chimed in Walter Hapworth. "But now that Ted has finished his meal I guess

we'd better drift away and let him get some sleep. I'll bet he needs it."

"Do I?" ejaculated Ted. "I'll be dead to the world in about five minutes and I bet I'll sleep for twenty-four hours."

He did not quite fulfil that prediction, but it was late the following morning when he arose, feeling still a bit stiff and sore from his long hours of confinement in the plane, but otherwise his radiant, vital self again.

He breakfasted and then hurried over to the flying field. To reach it the sooner, he took a short cut through a comparatively deserted street.

Only one figure was visible in it, and Ted, with a joyous start, saw that it was Hardwick, carrying a suitcase in his hand and evidently on his way to the railroad station.

Ted stopped short in his tracks and waited for Hardwick's approach.

CHAPTER IX

Whirling Fists

Hardwick seemed to be in a brown study. His eyes were fixed on the ground and it was not till he was within ten feet of Ted Scott that he looked up. Then he started back so violently that he almost dropped the suitcase from his hand.

"H-hello, Scott," he stammered, and made as if to pass.

Ted said nothing but barred the way, regarding his enemy with steady eyes.

Hardwick tried to meet the gaze, but before the biting contempt in the younger aviator's eyes his own wavered and fell.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "Why are you stopping me this way? I'm in a hurry to catch my train."

"I guess you'll have to catch the next; that is, if you're in shape to catch any train by the time I get through with you."

Hardwick dropped his suitcase.

"Look here," he blustered, "that's fighting talk."

"Precisely what I mean it to be," replied

Ted. "Throw off your coat, for I'm going to give you the thrashing of your life."

Hardwick looked about as though hoping for some intervention, but there was no one in sight.

"What's all this about, anyway?" he asked.

"Don't you know?" inquired Ted sarcastically.

"I do not," declared Hardwick.

"Don't remember anything about dropping those bombs and trying to gas me?" demanded Ted.

"I don't know what you're talking about," cried Hardwick.

"That simply shows that you're a liar as well as a would-be murderer," Ted declared. "Now if you don't want to prove that you're a coward as well, throw off your coat. I could put you behind the bars if I wanted to, but I prefer to settle my own accounts."

There was no help for it, and Hardwick threw off his coat and made a sudden rush for Ted, hoping to catch him off his guard.

But Ted was ready for him and met him with a terrific blow on the chin that sent him reeling back several yards.

But the man came on again, and in a moment the two were in a furious battle.

Hardwick was the heavier of the two, but Ted made up in strength and agility what he

lacked in weight. He easily evaded Hardwick's blows and sent in crashing ones in return that shook his enemy from his head to his heels.

For some minutes this continued. Then Hardwick in desperation resorted to foul tactics, butting with his head, kicking at Ted's shins, and trying to get at his eyes to gouge him.

Then Ted sailed in with right and left, raining a perfect shower of blows where they would do the most good, winding up with one to the jaw that sent Hardwick with a thud to the sidewalk. The rascal's nose was bleeding, one eye was closed, and his face looked as though he had come in contact with a pile driver.

He made no effort to rise, but lay there panting.

"Plenty more where that came from," remarked Ted. 'Get up and take your medicine."

But Hardwick made no attempt to rise.

"I'll have you arrested for this," he growled. "I'll see whether you can get away with felonious assault."

Ted laughed.

"Go right along to the police station," he said. "Tell them that I licked you and tell them why I licked you. Then if you get out of this town without being lynched I miss my guess. But how about this? Are you going to lie there all day? I'm waiting for you. I'm

just getting warmed up. Or have you had enough?"

"Enough," muttered Hardwick.

"I thought so," said Ted, as he picked up his coat and slipped it on. "I'm glad that I met you before you got to the railroad station. It would have spoiled my day if you'd got away before I'd paid you what I owed you. And this isn't a circumstance to what you'll get if you ever show your face in this town again."

Hardwick favored Ted with a look of deadly malignity, but judged it wise to keep a guard on his tongue. He put on his coat, dusted and arranged his bedraggled clothing as best he could, and, picking up his suitcase, made his way down the street to the station.

Ted watched him until he had turned the corner and then resumed his journey to the flying field.

"You look rather excited," commented Jackson, as Ted entered the hangar where the mechanic was polishing up the *Browning*.

"I shouldn't wonder," laughed Ted. "Just been having a little argument with Hardwick."

"A fight, you mean?" asked Jackson, interested at once.

"Doesn't this look like it?" asked Ted, with a grin, as he exhibited his knuckles, which had been skinned by their contact with Hardwick's jaw.

"That sure tells a story," replied Jackson. "But what was it that caused the mix-up between you two?"

In response, Ted told him of the gas bombs and how nearly they had put him out of the contest.

"The low-down skunk!" exclaimed Jackson indignantly. "If I'd known that, I'd have taken a swipe at him myself. So that's how the grub came to be poisoned, was it?"

"That's it," replied Ted. "I hope you've disposed of every scrap of it."

"Put it all in the furnace," said Jackson. "By good rights it ought to have been crammed down that fellow's throat."

"I have a hunch that the gas must have affected his own food," observed Ted. "That's the only explanation of the way he was doubled up with cramps. It was a case of the biter being bitten."

The noon whistle blew while Ted and Jackson were talking, and among the workers in the plant who trooped out and surrounded Ted, their former fellow-workman, were Jack Forrest, Breck Lewis and Mark Lawson.

"Here's the boy that brought home the bacon!" exclaimed Mark, clapping Ted on the shoulder.

"Brought it home for us as well as himself," added Jack. "Each of us has twenty-five extra

dollars in his jeans that we wouldn't have had if Ted hadn't copped the prize."

"I'll bet Hardwick was sore when he lost the contest," put in Breck. "That fellow's a hard loser."

"He's sore in more ways than one," remarked Jackson, and went on to tell the listening crowd the details of Hardwick's rascality and the punishment he had received from Ted.

The young aviator's friends were loud and furious in their denunciation.

"I don't believe the train has gone yet," said Breck, consulting his watch. "Let's go down to the station and change his map."

Ted shook his head.

"It's been pretty well changed already," he said. "He's had enough for one day. Let him stew in his own juice."

"I wonder whether that was his own idea or whether somebody else put him up to it," mused Jack Forrest.

"Who else would have done it?" asked Ted guardedly.

"Well, I noticed that he was in pretty thick with Brewster Gale," said Mark. "They were together before the contest started, and after Hardwick came down Gale took him away in his own car. It's common knowledge all around town that Gale was betting heavily against Ted. He must have lost a pot of money."

"For that matter, Gale's the only enemy that Ted has in the whole place," declared Breck. "Everybody knows that he hates him like poison and has always done all he could to injure him."

"He ought to get some of the same medicine that Ted gave Hardwick," said Jack hotly.

"Oh, well, we've got no proof, and now that I've got even with Hardwick I'm content to let the matter drop," said Ted. "The main thing is that the plot didn't work."

"And that Ted has added one more victory to his list," crowed Breck. "Gee, Ted, aren't you ever going to stop? Have a heart and give some other fellow a chance. You've got the altitude record, the endurance record, the ocean flight record, the non-stop record, and probably some others that I've forgotten."

"The only way to stop him is with a rifle or a hand grenade," declared Mark.

"Men have even tried that and failed," laughed Jack. "That lad sure must have a rabbit's foot concealed somewhere in his aviator's suit. But come along, fellows, or we won't have time to get a bite before the whistle blows."

The crowd gradually melted away and Ted had time to go over his machine and establish that it had suffered nothing from the long endurance test.

"She's a dandy," Ted remarked to Jackson. "I believe she could go right up and do it all over again."

"She'll never have to," prophesied Jackson. "That mark you set up won't be surpassed for many years to come. I'm betting that it never will be."

After the machine had been bestowed in the hangar, Ted started back to the Bromville House. He had not gone far before he saw Brewster Gale coming toward him.

Gale was in an execrable temper, as could be seen from the scowl on his face and the vicious way in which he swished his cane through the air as though he were belaboring an imaginary enemy.

"That naturally sweet disposition of his seems to have gone sour for some reason or another," murmured Ted to himself. "Probably he's figuring up the amount of the bets he lost on the contest."

Gale roused himself from his moody abstraction as he became conscious that some one was approaching, and when he recognized Ted Scott the look of a rattlesnake came into his eyes.

Ted would have passed him without a look or a sign, but as they came nearly abreast Gale lurched over, as though by mistake, against Ted. He was a heavy man and this, combined with the force he designedly put into the move-

ment, threw Ted off his balance and came very near to making him measure his length on the sidewalk.

For an instant Ted conjectured that the shove might possibly have been accidental, and waited for a word of apology. But Gale's next words were anything but that.

"Why can't you look where you're going, you clumsy lout?" Gale snarled. "Think you own the sidewalks as well as everything else in this town?"

Ted stepped up to him, his eyes blazing.

CHAPTER X

An Unexpected Letter

"You old reprobate, you did that deliberately to vent your spite," gritted Ted Scott through his clenched teeth. "You're presuming on the fact that you're an older man than I and that I won't hit you. I wish that you were twenty years younger so that I could give you the thrashing you deserve."

Gale gave back before Ted's wrath.

"It was you that knocked against me," he mumbled.

"That's false, and you know it," replied Ted. "You're as sore as the mischief because that plot of yours went wrong and I'm alive to-day when you'd like to see me dead."

A look of alarm came into the rascal's eyes.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "You'd better be careful of making any reckless statements of that kind or you'll find yourself in trouble."

"Not half the trouble you'd have, if I said one word of what I know to the authorities. What Hardwick might say, too, if the screws were put on him and his only chance to keep

out of jail was to put you in it, would be interesting."

Gale became as pale as ashes. The bow drawn at a venture had found its mark.

"Hard-Hardwick!" he stammered. "Has he been arrested?"

"Got you scared, have I?" said Ted. "Why should you care whether he's been arrested or not? Afraid he might say something that wouldn't leave you exactly comfortable?"

"Nothing of the kind," spluttered Gale. "It's simply because he was a guest at my hotel and I'm naturally interested in the matter."

"I see," said Ted. "Well, to relieve your mind I'll tell you that your accomplice hasn't been arrested. I met him in the street this morning, told him what I thought of him, and gave him a thrashing that I think he'll remember all his life. That's all just now. But the next time you feel tempted to lurch against me in the street take a fool's advice and don't do it."

Two more days passed without special incident. Ted Scott was busy with the proof sheets of a revised edition of his book describing his Atlantic and Pacific flights, the demand for which was steadily growing.

On the afternoon of the second day Walter Hapworth dropped in for a chat and found Ted stretched out in an easy chair on the porch of

the hotel, after a dinner in which Charity had outdone herself.

"You seem at peace with all the world," remarked Hapworth, as he helped himself to a chair.

"Why shouldn't I be?" returned Ted. "It's a pretty good old world when all is said and done, and I haven't any kick coming."

"A delightful frame of mind to be in," commented Walter, with a smile. "But say, Ted, I have a proposition to make. What do you say to making a trip with me to Detroit?"

Ted's face showed curiosity and surprise.

"That hits me all right," he replied. "I'll take you there in the plane any time you want to go."

"Thanks, old man," returned Walter. "But I'm asking something more than that you should take me there. I'm asking you to stay with me there for several weeks, possibly a month or two."

"I see," said Ted thoughtfully. "As you know, Walter, my vacation from the Air Service is nearly up. But I stand in pretty strong with them there and I'm sure that I could easily get an extension of leave if I asked for it. But what's the idea? Why this sudden flitting to the city of Detroit?"

"It's this way," explained Mr. Hapworth. "I've bought out a small airplane plant there

and I'm planning to extend it by putting in a big wad of capital. I'm convinced that airplanes are the vehicles of the future, and while I do not expect that the use of them will ever be as great as that of automobiles, I think there'll be an enormous development."

"So do I," replied Ted enthusiastically. "Why should people creep along the earth when they can fly through the air? A plane can run rings around any other speed contrivance in the world, and this is an age when speed counts almost above everything else. But you already have an airplane factory out on the Pacific Coast. I should think that would be enough to take up all your time and attention in that line."

"You might think so," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "But I've got that to running pretty smoothly now and I have some good reliable men in charge; so I don't have to devote much time to it. Then, too, that factory is designed for the manufacture of the larger type of planes. What I have in mind in this new venture is the making of a much smaller type, little, speedy, and safe."

"I see," replied Ted, smiling. "The kind that a man can fold up and put in his garage just as now he puts his car in."

"Well, hardly that," laughed Hapworth. "That kind won't come until they develop the

helicopter better than at present so that the plane can rise straight into the air without a runway. But you'll notice that there are an increasing number of men who are using small planes to get to and from their offices when they have their estates in the country."

"Yes," agreed Ted, "I was reading just the other day that some big business man had the top of the main building of his plant arranged so that his private plane could take off and land."

"Exactly! And as time goes on there will probably be a host of others to follow his example. But I'm hoping that it won't be confined to the rich. I hope the time will come when any ordinarily well-to-do family can have a little airplane in their home."

"Let's hope so," observed Ted. "But why Detroit for the seat of your new venture?"

"Because of the skilled workmen who can be found there," explained Walter. "They gravitate there from all parts of the country, chiefly of course for the automobile business. But the man who can make good engines and classy bodies for autos can also do the same for airplanes."

"Right you are," declared Ted. "Now just one question more. Where does your humble servant come in? Why do you want me to stay weeks or perhaps months in Detroit?"

"Because I want the benefit of your skilled advice in the designing and manufacture of the new type of plane," replied Hapworth. "No other man in all the world knows so much about those things from the practical point of view. Oh, that's true," he persisted, as Ted waved away the tribute. "There may be experienced mechanics who know more about the principles of machinery. But when it comes to knowing whether a machine will actually fly or not and if not why not, when it concerns stability, buoyancy, safety, and what not, you're in a class by yourself."

At this moment the postman came up the steps of the porch and handed a letter to Ted. He opened it rather mechanically, with a word of apology to Hapworth, and glanced at the signature.

He straightened up in his chair with a start of surprise.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's from Hardwick!"

CHAPTER XI

Dire Threats

Walter Hapworth's surprise at the announcement of the letter from Hardwick almost equaled Ted Scott's own.

"The nerve of the man!" he exclaimed. "What on earth is he writing to you about?"

"Plenty, I guess," replied Ted, as he ran his eyes down the first page of the letter. "From this first glimpse, I should say that it's full of stuff that's a crime to send through the mails. Gee, but maybe he isn't hopping!"

"That licking you gave him still rankles, does it?"

"That's no name for it," declared Ted. "Some of it isn't fit to be read aloud. But just listen to this:

" 'Don't think you're going to get away with that, you four-flusher. I'll get even with you yet, if it's the last thing I do. I'll make you wish you had never been born. Don't think for a moment that I'll forget. Some day I'll catch you napping and then may heaven have mercy on you, for I won't.' "

"Sounds like the warning of a rattlesnake!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth.

"Full of poison," agreed Ted. "There are four pages of that stuff and much of it is not only poisonous but vile. That fellow's mind must be a sewer."

"That's his type, sure enough," declared Walter. "Where did the letter come from?"

"Somewhere in Michigan," replied Ted, as he scrutinized the envelope. The postmark's blurred and I can't make out the name of the town, and he hasn't put the name of the place he's writing from at the head of the letter. Not that it matters much, for I wouldn't degrade myself by answering it."

"Of course not," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "It certainly sounds as though the man means mischief."

"No doubt he does," returned Ted carelessly, as he tore the letter into little bits. "But threatened men live long and I shan't lose any sleep over it."

"All the same, I hope you'll be on your guard," suggested Mr. Hapworth seriously.

"Oh, I'll keep my eyes open," asserted Ted. "But now about this Detroit matter. I don't think I'll be able to be of as much service to you as you seem to think, but all the same I'm with you, line, hook, and sinker. When are you planning to start?"

"In about two days, I figure," was the reply. "Will that be all right with you?"

"Perfectly," returned Ted. "I'll finish reading the proofs of my revised book to-day, and I'll spend to-morrow in preparing the plane for the trip. I'll get the Air Service superintendent on the long-distance 'phone this afternoon and get his consent. Then I'll be all set to go."

"Good," responded Mr. Hapworth, as he rose to go. "It will seem good, Ted, to get into the air once more together. Only this time it won't be quite so long as the trip over the Pacific."

"No," replied Ted, "nor as dangerous."

Mr. Hapworth departed and Eben Browning, who had been reading his paper at a little distance, folded up the sheet and looked at Ted.

"Couldn't help hearing what you were talking about, Ted," he said, with a touch of wistfulness in his tone. "So you're planning to leave us again, eh?"

"Why, yes, Dad," replied Ted. "You know what Walter has been to me, and you wouldn't have me refuse when he wanted me to do him a favor, would you?"

"Of course not," assented Eben. "But I wish he'd put it off for a little while. You're away from us so much, anyway, and Charity and I were figuring you'd be with us a couple of weeks yet."

"I'll try to arrange so as to stay with you a while after I get back from my work in Detroit," promised Ted. "You can't possibly want me to stay more than I want to. But these things will come up and I can't very well evade them."

"I know," sighed Eben. "What about that letter you got and tore up? I heard you say it was from Hardwick, but I didn't get the rights of what was in it."

"A lot of filth and a lot of threats," answered Ted. "The only way he knew to get back at me for the thrashing I gave him. But it doesn't amount to anything. Be sure not to mention it to mother. She'd only worry her heart out about it."

"I'm as mum as an oyster," declared Eben. "But be careful, Ted. He may be a blowhard, and then again he may try something against you. Keep your eyes open."

"I will," promised Ted. "But now I'll have to hustle, for I've got a lot of loose ends to tie up before I go. I'll skip down now and fix things up with the superintendent of our division."

He got in touch with that functionary and received a ready assent to an extension of his leave of absence.

"It'll be a great disappointment to all the boys of the division, though," the superinten-

dent stated. "They're as proud as Punch that one of their number set up a new endurance record and they're all primed to give you a great reception. I'll explain to them that your coming is only deferred for a while. Good-by and good luck."

With that important matter off his mind, Ted Scott hastened out to the flying field.

Jackson was busy as usual on the *Browning,* which he groomed with all the care and pride that a jockey feels in a favorite horse. He looked up as Ted approached.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he asked, and there was a caress in his tone as he looked at the plane.

"She's all of that," replied Ted enthusiastically. "She'll have a chance to prove her qualities again day after to-morrow, Jackson."

"Off on another trip?"

"Yes. I'm going to take off for Detroit, carrying Mr. Hapworth with me."

"Can't keep a squirrel on the ground or Ted Scott from flying," observed Jackson.

"Right you are," assented Ted. "I'm depending on you, Jackson, to get in the fuel and the food supplies. I guess we can count on the grub not being tainted this time," he added with a grin.

"Don't remind me of that skunk or I'll be foaming at the mouth," declared Jackson.

"Every time I think of him I see red. It'll be all right about the supplies. Just leave everything to me and forget about it."

The next day Ted devoted to winding up his work on his book and during the following morning he finished everything and was ready to start before midday. He knew that with ordinary luck he and Walter would be able to reach Detroit before night and thus obviate the necessity of flying in the dark.

He bade an affectionate farewell to Eben and Charity, promising to write to them every week, and repaired to the field, where he found Walter waiting for him, together with Paul Monet, who had come to see them off.

Jackson had wheeled the *Browning* out of her hangar and the plane stood, quivering like a living thing anxious to spread her wings and mount into the skies.

Ted, as was his invariable practice, made a careful examination of every part of the plane. Jackson had done his work well and the machine was in prime condition.

Mr. Hapworth had already taken his seat in the cockpit and Ted drew on his helmet and gauntlets and prepared to follow him.

He shook hands warmly with Mr. Monet and Jackson and jumped in. The mechanic knocked away the blocks and the *Browning* zipped down the runway. She ran a few hundred feet and

then Ted lifted her into the air and turned her head toward Detroit.

The silencer had been adjusted so that the roar of the motor was subdued to a muffled hum and Ted and Mr. Hapworth were able to converse almost as easily as though on the ground.

"Off to a good start!" exclaimed Walter, who was in high spirits.

"And on the way, let us hope, to a good finish," responded Ted. "The only thing I don't like is the weather. Seems as if it were fixing for rain. That won't be so bad, if fog doesn't come along with it. The weather prophecies for to-day weren't any too good. It's so hazy now that I can't see the ground. Unless it thins out pretty soon, I'll have to fly altogether by my instruments."

But for a time Ted's forebodings were not justified. At intervals the haze thinned out a little and not long after noon they had even a little hour of sunshine.

Shortly after that, however, a great mass of black clouds began to pile up on the horizon.

"Guess you were right, Ted, after all," remarked Mr. Hapworth. "We're in for a downpour."

"If it's only rain, I don't care," responded Ted. "It's the lightning I don't like. I'm leary of it after the way it shook me up when

I was trying to beat the endurance record."

"Oh, well, lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place," remarked Mr. Hapworth consolingly.

"More than one man is in his grave because he believed that bromide," and Ted grinned.

Presently the rain began to fall in scattered drops that rapidly increased until the water came down in a torrent. The weight of water on the wings decreased the buoyancy of the plane somewhat, but had no other effect except in obscuring the glass of the cockpit and making it difficult for the young pilot to see far in front of him.

The rain was furious while it lasted, but it kept up for only half an hour. It was followed by a foe much more to be dreaded—fog, the special enemy of the airman.

The fog gradually thickened until it completely enshrouded the plane. The machine with its inmates seemed to be a spectral thing moving like a wraith through the mist, which penetrated the cockpit, settling on the clothes of the voyagers until they were dripping and sodden. All landmarks were blotted out and Ted was forced to rely wholly on his instruments.

Through the darkness came a distant hum that soon deepened into a roar.

Ted and Walter Hapworth exchanged

glances. There was no need to speak. Each knew what that ominous roar meant.

Another airplane was voyaging the air through that dense mass of fog, and from the sound it seemed to be heading straight for them!

CHAPTER XII

A Close Call

"Disconnect that silencer, Walter!" shouted Ted Scott. "He's got to hear us so as to get an idea where we are. Quick!"

Mr. Hapworth did as directed and the roar of the *Browning* became thunderous.

Ted pulled on the joystick and the plane shot upward. But he could tell from the sound that the pilot of the other plane had been prompted to do the same thing at the same instant.

Ted pushed on the control and the plane went down like a plummet. But in this the unknown pilot also followed.

Desperately as the two airmen were trying to avoid each other, it seemed as though a malignant fate was trying to bring them together.

Now the approaching plane was terribly near.

Ted darted to the right. As he did so a great mass loomed up in front. It came on like a catapult almost on the same level, and rushed past so close that a biscuit could have been tossed from one to the other.

A few feet more to the right and the speeding Juggernaut would have met the *Browning*

head on, and both, with their occupants, would have been hurled to certain death.

It was an almost miraculous escape, and it left both Ted and Mr. Hapworth badly shaken.

Ted readjusted the silencer and leaned back, wiping the beads of perspiration that had started from his brow.

"Gee, but that was a narrow shave!" he ejaculated.

"Altogether too close for comfort," agreed Walter. "They say that when a man is drowning all the events of his past life seem to flash before his eyes. I know that a considerable slice of my own past came to me when that thing loomed up out of the fog."

"Well, we have company in our excitement," remarked Ted. "I'll bet that fellow in the other plane, whoever he is, got as much of a mental jolt as we did."

"I think a drink of coffee is indicated," said Mr. Hapworth, as he unscrewed the top of a thermos bottle.

"You never said a truer thing," agreed Ted, and he took a draught of the stimulating beverage.

For another hour the fog enshrouded the *Browning*. Then gradually it began to lift. Before long, through the shredding mist they could catch glimpses of the ground below. Then, at last, as though Nature had decided to

make a good job of it, the sun broke through and drove away the last vestige of fog.

The spirits of the voyagers rose as they found themselves sailing along in a sea of sunshine.

Ted consulted his clock and calculated the number of miles that had already been reeled off.

"We've been making good time," he remarked to his companion. "Right up to the schedule and a little ahead. No reason at all why we shouldn't get to Detroit before dark."

"You can't make me mad by telling me anything like that," was the reply, as Walter settled himself more easily in his seat.

Half an hour passed and then Mr. Hapworth touched Ted's arm.

"See that thing up there?" he said, pointing to the sky and a little to the right.

Ted looked in the direction indicated.

"Sure enough," he replied. "A plane, and a big one, too. It looks like—yes, it is one of the Air Mail Service planes! Gee, it makes me almost homesick to be with the boys again!"

They watched the plane for a moment as it sailed like a huge bird through the skies. Then Ted gave vent to an abrupt exclamation.

"What's that red streak?" he cried. "Look! At the tail of the plane! The thing's on fire!"

Ted Scott's heart seemed to turn over in his body as the terrible fact burst upon him.

"I wonder if the pilot knows it!" cried Mr. Hapworth. "Yes, he does. See? He's fighting it."

Like a flash Ted turned the direction of his plane and darted forward to the help of the imperiled airman.

What he could do he did not know. But he was possessed by a tremendous urge to get as near the burning plane as possible so as to be ready to do everything in his power.

The *Browning,* pushed to its limit, was zipping through the ether like a comet. Its occupants could see that the pilot of the mail plane was working desperately to control the fire. Despite his utmost efforts, it was gaining on him. He was driven back inch by inch. Ted Scott knew something of the despair that must be tearing at the man's heart as he battled, hoping against hope to subdue his fearful enemy.

"Why doesn't he let up on fighting it and get his plane to the ground as soon as possible!" groaned Hapworth. "He might know that that's his only chance."

"He can't," cried Ted. "The flames have cut him off from the cockpit. He can't get at the controls. See? He's crawling out on one of the wings."

It was a fearful sight, and Ted Scott's heart was wrung with agony.

"Get loose that coil of rope, Walter," he

shouted. "Fasten one end to the tank so that it can't slip. Then stand by till I give the word."

The burning plane was now so near that through their glasses the two in the *Browning* could see the anguished expression of the pilot's face.

"Jump! Jump!" yelled Walter Hapworth, though he knew that the man could not hear him.

"He can't!" cried Ted. "See how charred and burned the parachute is! It's full of holes and wouldn't carry him. He'd drop like a stone."

Mr. Hapworth had fastened the rope, and now, at Ted's command, he ran a noose at the end of it.

"Drop it to the man when I tell you to," commanded the young aviator as he engineered the *Browning* until it hovered directly above the burning plane.

The endangered pilot had noted the action of his rescuers and apparently had grasped its meaning.

"Now!" yelled Ted.

The rope fell and the man made a grab for it, but missed it by six inches.

As it swayed back, however, he managed to grasp it. He clung to it with the energy of despair. Then, seeing the noose, he slipped it

over his head and shoulders until it settled tight under his arms.

The next moment he was swung off into space. The rope groaned with his weight, but it held.

He had barely left the wing when the plane headed downward and fell in a long trail of flame to the earth.

Ted set his controls so that the plane would stay on a level keel and rushed to Hapworth's side. Then with feverish energy they both pulled on the rope and gradually, foot by foot, drew it upward with its burden.

It was a terrible strain and they felt as though their arms were being dragged from their sockets. But a human life was at stake and they worked like supermen. As the slack came in they wound it about the tank and at last were rewarded by getting the man within arm's reach. Then they grasped his hands and with one final effort pulled him into the plane.

The man's face was so burned and grimed with flame and smoke that he was almost unrecognizable. His weight upon the rope had drawn the noose so tight that it seemed as though his body would be cut in two. With a sharp knife Ted cut the rope and the bursting lungs had room to expand.

The plane was wobbling now, and Ted rushed to get it under control, leaving first-aid ministrations to Mr. Hapworth. From the medi-

cine kit that was always carried, the latter drew salves and lotions that relieved the burns. Fortunately, these proved to be confined chiefly to the face and hands, and while painful were not serious. The heavy aviator togs had protected the body, although the clothes were charred and smoking.

In a few minutes the man had recovered sufficiently to sit up and speak.

"I can't thank you boys enough," he said gratefully. "That sure was quick thinking on your part. I thought my last hour had come."

That voice! Where had Ted heard it before?

He turned his head sharply and looked at the rescued man. The next moment he had his arms about him and was hugging him boisterously.

"By the great horn spoon!" yelled Ted in delight. "Bill Twombley! Good old Bill!"

"Ted Scott!" shouted Bill rapturously. "You old rascal! But then I might have known that no one on earth but you would have had the nerve and skill to pull off this thing."

"How on earth did you get over here?" asked Ted, after the first joyous greetings were over. "I thought you were still on the Rocky Mountain Division."

"I still am, as far as that goes. But this division was shorthanded and they transferred

me here until they could fill up their complement," was the reply.

Ted Scott and Bill Twombley were old comrades and the warmest of friends. They had first met while engaged in flood relief work in Arkansas and later had been co-workers on the Rocky Mountain mail route.

"Well, now, old scout," said Ted, "the first thing to think of is yourself. How badly are you hurt?"

"Just superficial burns, I guess," replied Bill. "Sore as the mischief, but nothing worse. So just push on your stick and take me down to my plane."

"I'm afraid it's past praying for," surmised Walter Hapworth, as he looked downward at the plane that was still blazing.

"All the same, I've got to get there," replied Bill Twombley. "The mail is there and that's my job. May be able to rescue something."

The plane had fallen in the midst of a great field that seemed to Ted to offer no great difficulties in landing. He brought the *Browning* down, selected a comparatively level spot, and brought the plane to a stop not far from the wrecked machine.

The three young men jumped out and hurried to it. Much of the fire had died down by this time, as a number of spectators had been

drawn to the spot and had done what they could with dirt and water to subdue the flames.

The machine itself was a wreck. What the fire had not done the crash had completed. But some of the mail bags, though charred, had retained part of their contents intact, and Bill's relief was incalculable when he found that the registered mail bag, more important than all the rest put together, was substantially uninjured.

"Might have been worse," said Bill, with what philosophy he could muster. "At least I'm alive, thanks to you two, and that's more than I dared hope for when I climbed out on the wing of that plane. I never expected to be nearer death and yet not have it grab me."

"I'm certainly glad that we happened to come along," responded Ted. "But what are you going to do now, Bill? Hop aboard and we'll carry you to Detroit."

"You can leave the mail bags in the care of the local post-office," suggested Walter.

Bill shook his head.

"The old ship's gone down, but the captain must stand by," he said. "I'll have these things carried to the nearest town. Then I'll wire or 'phone to the head of the division and ask for orders."

"Put the bags aboard the *Browning* and we'll take you and them wherever you want

to go," offered Ted and Walter almost in one breath.

Again Bill declined.

"Take you too much out of your way," he said. "No, thanks just the same. If some of these good people will help me, I'll get along all right."

A number of the spectators had come in their cars, and so many eagerly offered to help that Bill had only the embarrassment of choice.

"Well," Ted compromised, "promise me that you'll see a doctor at once and have those burns properly treated."

"Mr. Hapworth is no slouch of a doctor himself, but I'll do as you say," replied Bill, grinning.

There was a hurried exchange of handclasps, and Ted and Walter jumped into the cockpit of the *Browning,* zoomed into the sky, and once more headed for Detroit.

"Some day this!" murmured Hapworth.

"You said it!" replied Ted.

CHAPTER XIII

An Ugly Adversary

"Do you think, Ted, we can still make Detroit before dark?" asked Walter Hapworth.

"It will take some traveling to do it," replied Ted Scott. "But traveling is the middle name of this beauty," and he patted the plane affectionately. "I've never yet let her out to the top of her speed, but now is the time she's going to show us what she can do."

He put on full power and the *Browning* leaped forward like a frightened thing. The country below them unreeled like a ribbon as she put mile after mile behind her. Like a comet she whizzed along and just before the sun was setting the towers and tall buildings of the great manufacturing city came into view.

"Did it, by Jove!" exclaimed Ted in delight, as he slapped his thigh.

"As you always do what you set out to do," remarked Mr. Hapworth, with a smile. "Fog can't stop you. An accident like that of Twombley's can't stop you. Some way and somehow you always manage to do what you set out to do."

In a short time they were hovering over Detroit. Beneath them the river of the same name wound its way like a silver ribbon through the city, bearing upon its bosom a greater volume of commerce than any other stream of its size in the world.

Ted circled about looking for the flying field, and, having discovered its location, made for it. He pulled the stick and the *Browning* descended in long sweeping spirals and landed as gracefully as a swan.

The two young men made arrangements for the storing of the plane and then hastened to the rooms that had been reserved for them by telegraph in one of the leading hotels.

A shower and change of clothes worked wonders in refreshing them after their arduous trip, and with appetites sharpened by their long stay in the open air they did full justice to the dinner that awaited them.

Ted dispatched a telegram to Eben and Charity telling them of his safe arrival. Then he retired early, for the day's strain and excitement had made bed seem very grateful.

The next morning with Mr. Hapworth he repaired to the plant that the latter had purchased.

It was admirably located with a view to shipments by both rail and river. As Walter had said, it was not remarkable for its size, but

there was abundant room on either side for the construction of additional buildings. Already designs had been drawn up for these, and Ted and Mr. Hapworth studied them with absorbing interest.

The two made an admirable team for an enterprise of the kind. Walter Hapworth, though young, was an experienced business man, thoroughly familiar with all the problems of commerce and finance. He had already made good in numerous big undertakings and was now enthusiastically embarked on this airplane manufacturing venture.

Ted, on his part, knew all about planes from both a theoretical and practical point of view. In the great Devally-Hipson plant at Bromville he had served his apprenticeship, passing from one department to another until he had learned every detail of all of them. He could have built a plane from start to finish himself. Anything connected with flying—motors, struts, wings, instruments—were like A. B. C. to Ted Scott.

But if he was peerless from the mechanical point of view, he was quite as much so from the flier's standpoint. No matter how good things may look in blue prints, the actual tests come when they are put into practice. Many a plane looks good on the ground that is anything but good when it gets into the air. So Ted Scott's vast experience in actual flying could be de-

pended on to make his judgment invaluable in the making and testing of the smaller types of planes that Hapworth was figuring to turn out. So it came to pass as the days went by that Mr. Hapworth devoted himself almost entirely to the financial and expansion program while Ted had the last word in the construction of the planes.

It was work that Ted Scott loved, and he devoted himself to it with the ardor of a zealot. For Walter Hapworth's sake and his own, he was bent on making the new enterprise a glittering success.

One night, after he had been about two weeks in Detroit, Ted had occasion to go to a telegraph station at a late hour to send a message that he did not want to defer until the following day.

He had become familiar with the town by that time, and on his return to the hotel chose a short cut through one of the streets bordering the river, to reach more quickly his destination.

It was rather a rough quarter, and as hold-ups had been somewhat frequent of late, Ted hastened his steps in order to get to the more brilliantly lighted section.

He was approaching one of the speakeasies —places where liquor was sold against the law —which had as its entrance a flight of stone steps leading to a basement. He had come

nearly abreast with it when the door opened and half a dozen men came out and up the steps.

Ted turned out of his way to avoid them, but one of the group tripped and lurched heavily against him.

"Why can't you look where you're going?" the fellow snarled, as he regained his balance with difficulty.

"It was you that knocked against me," replied Ted quietly.

"None of your lip!" blurted the other belligerently. "For two cents I'd knock your head off."

"I don't think so," returned Ted, controlling his temper and trying to pass.

"Maybe you think I can't," challenged the other.

"I don't think anything about it," was Ted's reply, again attempting to go on his way.

"Seems to me I know that voice," broke in another of the gang as he shouldered his way through the group. "Let me get a good look at this guy."

The light from a near-by lamp revealed the speaker's features and Ted recognized—Hardwick!

The recognition was mutual, and Hardwick's face, already inflamed from drink, grew redder with animosity.

"Sure as guns!" he cried hoarsely. "Now, you four-flusher, I've got you where I want you. Fellers," he shouted to the others, "this is the guy that did me dirt. Let's do him up."

In Ted Scott's mind there was equal anger and disgust. He had no desire to get into a street brawl with these rowdies. At the same time there was something roused in him that forbade him to retreat.

"Now look here, Hardwick," he said sharply, "I should think you'd had enough of my game. I've trimmed you once and I can trim you again. But I'm not looking for trouble and I advise you to go home and sleep it off. Get out of my way now and let me pass."

"So you think you're going to get away with that guff, do you?" cried Hardwick. "Come along fellows and soak him. We'll put him in the hospital."

Hardwick's companions crowded round Ted with threatening murmurs.

CHAPTER XIV

Sorely Pressed

Ted Scott threw himself into an attitude of defense. Hardwick lunged out at him viciously.

Ted let fly with a terrific blow between the eyes that would have stretched Hardwick on the sidewalk, had it not driven him back among the crowd.

A moment more and the whole gang set upon Ted. The young aviator found himself in a medley of pounding fists.

Four of the gang assailed him in front while two attacked him from the rear.

"Get hold of his arms," shouted Hardwick to these two. "Grip him fast and we'll beat him into a jelly."

Two lightning blows repelled the foremost attackers and Ted, profiting by the momentary respite, swung himself around and flung off his assailants in the rear. Then he backed up against a wall so that all his enemies were in front.

They had already learned how formidable was the foe they were fighting against and were warier in their onset. Still, the knowledge that

they were six to one gave them confidence and they rushed at Ted ferociously, egged on by the hoarse cries of Hardwick.

Ted's blood was up now and his arms were working like flails. Had all his enemies been sober, he would have had no chance against such overwhelming odds. But in their semi-fuddled condition they were at a disadvantage. Again and again they came on, and each time Ted drove them back with a volley of crashing blows, each placed where it would do the most good.

He was panting now from his terrific exertions. His knuckles were skinned and bleeding. He had adroitly dodged most of his adversaries blows, but some of them had found their mark. Sooner or later the odds must tell.

Above all things he must keep his feet. Once down and under the feet of those beasts, he would be kicked and trampled into insensibility, possibly killed.

The very blows he was dealing were exhausting his strength. He was drawing on the reserves of his superb vitality and a time was sure to come when they would fail to respond.

But they had not failed yet, and he staged a tremendous rally. Abandoning for the moment the wall against which he was backing, he launched himself like a thunderbolt against the serried mass in front of him. When that rally

was ended three of them lay groaning on the sidewalk and the others were faltering. They had not counted on meeting a wildcat.

A shout arose from one of the gang.

"A cop!" he yelled. "Beat it, fellows!"

Around the corner a bluecoat was coming on the run, attracted by the sounds of combat.

The ruffians pulled their stricken comrades to their feet and hurried down the street as fast as their legs could carry them.

The officer came abreast of Ted, who was leaning panting against the wall, his collar torn off in the struggle and his clothes disheveled.

"Here, what's all this?" demanded the guardian of the law.

"A gang of roughs attacked me and tried to beat me up," explained Ted, as he stooped to pick up his hat.

"That's what they all say," returned the officer sarcastically. "Of course you were innocent. You didn't do a thing. Come along with me. I'm going to run you in for fighting in the street."

"Just as you say, officer," rejoined Ted. "But I think you're making a mistake. I can give you my name and address and you'll find I'm respectable. Or if you will, you can prove it by calling up my hotel and asking about Ted Scott."

The policeman pricked up his ears.

"What's that?" he asked. "Scott? Ted Scott? You don't mean that you're the man that flew over the Atlantic Ocean?"

"Guessed it the first time," replied Ted.

The officer was all apologies at once.

"Sure, and I'd 've known you from your pictures if I'd only looked twice! Let me shake hands with you, Mr. Scott," he urged. "It will be an honor I'll remember all my life. Well, well! And to think I came near to running you in!" he exclaimed with compunction.

"That's all right, officer," replied Ted. "You were only doing your duty. Come round to our plant some day when you have a little while to yourself and I'll take you up for a little spin in my plane."

"Sure. I'll be tickled to death to do that," was the reply. "But say, Mr. Scott, are you sure you're not hurt? You look pretty well mussed up."

"Oh, they handed me a few cracks and rumpled up my clothes a little," replied Ted. "Apart from that I'm all right."

"How many of them roughnecks did you say there were?" asked the officer.

"Six of them," answered Ted.

"And you stood off the whole six!" exclaimed the officer in admiration. "It must have been a peach of a scrap. But it's a wonder they didn't kill you."

"Oh, they were all the worse for liquor and that made the job easier," replied Ted.

"What was the big idea?" came the question. "Were they trying to rob you?"

"Not that," was the reply. "One of them was a fellow I had a little mix-up with some time ago. He recognized me and called on his pals to pile in."

"If you'll give me the fellow's name, I'll have him hunted up and arrested," volunteered the officer.

"Not that," returned Ted. "I'll settle my account with him when opportunity offers. But I'll have to be getting along now."

"Shan't I go with you a little way?" suggested the policeman. "They may be laying for you around some corner."

"No, thanks," replied Ted, smiling. "I think they've had all they want for one night. Don't forget that engagement you have to go up in the air with me."

They exchanged cordial farewells and Ted resumed his journey to the hotel. He slipped into a side entrance and regained his room without attracting any attention, except from the elevator boy, whose curiosity Ted declined to satisfy.

He had to admit when he looked in the glass that he was anything but an attractive figure. His hair was wild, his clothes rumpled, and

there was a swelling on his cheekbone where one of the roughs had struck him. But apart from a few bruises on his arms and chest he had come out remarkably well in his fight against heavy odds. He chuckled to himself as he reflected on the way that Hardwick and his gang must be feeling.

The next day at the plant he related to Walter the adventure of the night before. The young business man listened with interest and indignation, and his face was grave when Ted had finished.

"It must have been a beautiful scrap," he commented. "I'm glad that you licked them to a frazzle. So Hardwick is in Detroit now, is he? You want to keep a lookout, Ted. That fellow is bad medicine and if he hated you before, he hates you doubly now."

"I suppose so," said Ted carelessly. "But I'm not going to lose any sleep over it."

"I wouldn't put it past him to set gunmen on your trail," went on Mr. Hapworth anxiously. "I'd feel a heap sight easier on your account if you carried a revolver. It would be a simple matter to get a permit."

"No," declared Ted. "I don't care to carry one. Suppose I'd had one with me to-night! I might have killed some of them. I'll depend a little while longer on these old fists of mine. They've never gone back on me yet."

Two days later Walter Hapworth spoke to Ted as he was about to leave the plant.

"Come over to my rooms to-night, Ted," he said. "There'll be some interesting people there that I'm sure you'll be glad to meet."

"Sure thing," assented Ted. "I'll be there."

Four men had preceded Ted when the latter strolled into Walter Hapworth's suite that evening. A glance at their faces told Ted that he had never seen any of them before. But that they knew him was evident by the way they came forward eagerly to meet him without waiting for a formal introduction. Almost everybody in America knew Ted Scott's face. Probably no face in the world had been more extensively pictured.

Mr. Hapworth intervened with a laugh.

"You see they all know you, Ted," he said. "That is one of the penalties of fame. I told them you were coming and they were all crazy to meet you."

There were smiles and murmurs of assent from the group.

"But although they all know you," went on Walter, "you haven't the same pleasure of knowing them by name. I'll correct that right away. Ted, this is Mr. Barr, Mr. Ormsby, Mr. Dalton, and Mr. Anderson. They're good fellows, one and all of them."

"I'm sure of that," smiled Ted, as he acknowledged the introductions.

They settled down in comfortable chairs and soon were chatting easily. Naturally, the chief subject of conversation at first was that of Ted's exploits. All were eager to question him about his experiences in flying over the Atlantic and the Pacific, in the long non-stop voyage to Australia, in the achievement of his altitude and endurance records and the other things that had made of him a national hero.

Ted tried to gloss over these as much as possible, but the men would not let him. To meet Ted Scott and talk with him was a great pleasure, and they were going to make the most of their opportunity.

At the first chance afforded him the young aviator sought to make a break in the subject.

"What business are you gentlemen in, if I may ask?" Ted inquired, directing his question to Barr, as spokesman for the rest.

They all hesitated and looked at each other.

Walter Hapworth laughed.

"Don't think they're ashamed of their jobs, Ted," he said. "They're a very modest set of gentlemen and are singularly shy of speaking of their work. But I guess they can make an exception when Ted Scott is the only one to know."

"I think you're right," replied Barr, smiling. "Well, then, in strictest confidence I'll tell you, Mr. Scott, that all of us are officers in the United States Secret Service."

"That makes my pleasure double in meeting you," stated the young aviator. "I've met some of your comrades before and I've found them royal good fellows. I remember one especially named Burnaby. Saw him last year. Maybe you know him."

"Tom Burnaby. Sure we know him!" replied Anderson. "Good old scout. One of the best. That reminds me that Burnaby was telling us some time ago about the way you helped him round up that gang in the mail robbery. Said he'd never have got the skunks if it hadn't been for you."

"I'm afraid he is too generous," answered Ted deprecatingly. "But I certainly enjoyed working with him. But in just what branch of the Secret Service are you gentlemen working, if I may ask?"

"Just now we're detailed to work against the smugglers," explained Barr.

"Your headquarters are in Detroit, I presume, because of the nearness to the Canadian border," surmised Ted.

"Just so," replied Ormsby. "Windsor, Canada, is just across the river. If this were day-

time, we could see it from the window of this room."

"I suppose there's an awful lot of smuggling going on," remarked Ted.

"All the time," agreed Dalton. "There's very little chance of our getting rusty for lack of work."

"It must be very interesting matching your wits against the dealers in contraband," suggested Ted.

"It certainly is," replied Barr. "But it isn't so much fun when their wits get the better of ours."

"I don't believe that happens very often," remarked Ted politely.

"Don't you believe it!" exclaimed Barr, with a wry grimace. "I guess all of us have sore spots in our memories about the way we've been tricked, eh, fellows?"

There was a general smile of assent.

"The only comfort is that we usually get them at last," declared Anderson. "They may fool us sometimes, but they can't do it all the time. Sooner or later they usually come to the end of their rope. We generally have the last laugh."

CHAPTER XV

Wily Scoundrels

"What are the things they try to smuggle over the line?" asked Ted Scott of the Secret Service men.

"Practically everything on which there is a duty or that runs against the law," replied Ormsby. "It may be something as big as a man or as little as a diamond. All is fish that comes to their net. They're not particular, as long as it gets them a profit."

"By men I suppose you mean immigrants that can't come into the country in the regular quota," observed Ted.

"Exactly," assented Barr. "It's astonishing, too, how big that traffic is. It's been estimated that more people get into the country unlawfully than by the legal method. Somewhere up in the hundreds of thousands. It's worse down on the Mexican border than it is up here, because it's easier to get over the Rio Grande. But it's bad enough here, in all conscience. People come over the river in rowboats, others by the bridges and the ferry."

"And by much queerer routes," put in

Ormsby. "Don't you remember, Jack, that little seventeen-year-old dressmaker that came over from Canada on a narrow ledge above the Whirlpool Rapids?"

"I remember," replied Barr. "Gee, she had her nerve with her! She put on men's clothes—a pair of trousers, a cap, and a sweater—and was lowered at night by a rope over the gorge dam on the Canadian side. Then, accompanied by one of the smugglers, she made her way across the gorge on the narrow steel ledge which forms part of the abutment of the railroad bridge, two hundred and fifty feet above the swirling waters of the Whirlpool Rapids."

"Nerve is right!" exclaimed Ted. "A single misstep and—"

"Death!" finished Barr.

"What was the outcome of the adventure?" asked Ted. "Did they nab the girl?"

"Oh, they got her all right," replied Barr. "But it was more by good luck than good management. She got to this side, all serene, and was hidden in the house of one of the smugglers. But that same fellow brought four women over the lower river the next night in a rowboat and one of our men followed him. He captured the bunch and the little dressmaker was taken in the same net."

"How many of those who try it get by, do you think?" asked Ted with interest.

"More than half, I imagine," responded Anderson. "They are so many and we law-enforcement officers are so few. Take these crowded ferries between Detroit and Windsor, with thousands going across every day for shopping or the races. It isn't possible to put each one through a special inquisition. We're often able to spot them, but a lot inevitably slip through the meshes."

"I suppose the rum-runners keep you busy," remarked Mr. Hapworth. "They say there's a regular flood of liquor going over the border to every part of the United States."

"All too true," admitted Ormsby, with a frown. "The bootleggers have high powered trucks manned by desperate and armed men, and although a good many of the trucks are stopped and seized, the profit in the business is so great that they are satisfied if one out of three gets through. Then, too, they're sometimes in collusion with the faithless public officials who make their path easy. Still, I think the service is tightening up all the time and the smuggling, I think, is steadily growing less."

"We have one advantage there," put in Dalton. "That is that trucks and barrels and cases are things that can be seen. Our chief difficulty is with the things that can't be seen because they're so small that they can be con-

cealed on the person or in innocent appearing things that don't arouse suspicion."

"Like that fellow we nabbed in the watch spring case," suggested Ormsby.

"What was that?" asked Ted.

"It was this way," explained Ormsby. "There are a lot of things from abroad on which there is a duty to be paid if they're brought to the United States, but which Canada admits free of duty, watch cases and movements, jewelry, and the like. There's a big profit in smuggling them into this country from Canada and thus evading the payment of any duty at all.

"I'd had my eye for a long time on a fellow that I suspected was engaged in this business, a man named Levitz. He made frequent trips over the border in an automobile. Several times he had been stopped and searched without finding anything on him. His car, too, had no hidden compartments, and for a time we were up a tree. One day I noticed what seemed to be a scratch on a spare tire that he carried on the back of the machine. I looked at it carefully and concluded that it was not a scratch but a cut. It had been camouflaged, but not quite carefully enough. I told Levitz I was going to open that tire. He turned pale and protested. I told him that the Government would make good on the tire, if my suspicions proved

wrong. I cut open the tire and a perfect avalanche of watch cases, movements and jewelry poured out. There was over ten thousand dollars' worth of smuggled goods in that tire."

"Clever work," commented Ted. "I suppose that was the end of things for Mr. Levitz."

"For a while, anyway," replied Ormsby. "He got a long sentence and he's got plenty of time to think the matter over and wonder whether it really pays to break the law."

"I remember how one fellow was betrayed by a limp," put in Barr. "He'd come from Europe and was landing in New York. It was late at night and most of the passengers had left the ship hours before. This fellow came down the gangplank to the pier that seemed to be deserted. But it only seemed to be. One of our men, George Closk, was lurking in the shadows. He noticed that this man had a slight limp. He didn't think the man was lame, because one leg was just as long as the other. He didn't think tight shoes were the trouble, for in fact the shoes seemed to be unusually large for a man of his size.

"So George steps out and confronts the man.

" 'Why do you limp?' asked George softly.

The man started violently.

" 'I—my feet hurt,' he stammered.

" 'Ah! Your feet hurt. Yes?' said George.

"Just like that. George said nothing more but just stood there watching the man who turned all the colors of the rainbow. He tried to brazen it out, but the fear in his eyes gave him away. George gathered him in and made him take off his shoes. And there in tiny compartments of the heels and toes were over one hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds!"

Ted whistled.

"That sure was one big haul!" he ejaculated.

"You said it!" replied Barr.

"But what made him limp?" asked Walter Hapworth.

"That's where the joke was on the smuggler," laughed Barr. "Some of the sharp-edged diamonds had worked their way out of one of the compartments and were cutting into his feet. Hence the limp."

"Diamonds are our chief problem," put in Anderson. "They're precious and they're so small that they can be easily concealed in almost anything. Why, one of our men broke open the cigar of a smuggler he'd caught and found fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds in that one cigar."

"An expensive smoke," grinned Ted.

"Well, that's the way it goes," observed Barr. "Most of the old tricks we're wise to, but the smugglers are thinking up new ones all

the time. Do you wonder that we fellows have to keep on our toes?"

"Not at all," replied Ted. "I can see where you can't afford to let your brains grow sluggish."

"It's the diamond smugglers that worry us more than all other kinds put together," remarked Ormsby. "Did you know that the business of the jewelry industry in the United States amounts to a billion dollars a year?"

"A thousand millions of dollars!" exclaimed Ted. "Gee, but that's a lot of money!"

"You bet it is," rejoined Ormsby. "But the serious thing from our point of view is that fifty per cent. of the diamonds sold in the United States every year never go through the custom house. That means the Government is annually defrauded out of the duties on half a billion dollars worth of diamonds."

"It means, too," added Barr, "that honest dealers who pay the duties are undersold by the tricky ones who can undersell them because they get their goods cheaper from the smugglers."

"What is the duty on diamonds?" asked Ted, with interest.

"Twenty per cent.," replied Anderson. "That means that, if half a billion dollars worth of diamonds succeed in evading the duty,

the United States Government is cheated every year out of a hundred million dollars."

"Gee, but those figures make my head swim!" ejaculated Ted. "Just how is the game worked?"

"Not so much by individuals as by colossal smuggling rings," explained Barr. "You see, Antwerp and Amsterdam are the great centers of the diamond trade for the whole world. The smugglers have headquarters there as well as in America. Those in America get their orders from dishonest jewelers here. The men in Antwerp and Amsterdam furnish the carriers to bring them over to this country. If they get past the customs, they deliver the diamonds to their customers here. You see the disadvantage this is to the honest men in the trade. On one block may be an honest dealer who has had to pay twenty per cent. on his goods and therefore has to charge higher prices. On the next block is a dishonest dealer who has not paid duty and so can sell the same goods much cheaper."

"It's an ugly game," declared Ted. "Still, there must be a good deal of expense in carrying it on, and with the big losses that happen when a smuggler is seized and his goods confiscated it must cut a big slice out the smugglers' profits."

"It does, of course," admitted Barr. "But they can afford that and still come out at the big end of the horn. Of the twenty per cent. that is saved because of not paying duties, the smugglers figure on eight per cent. for their share. That covers all losses and expenses and leaves them an enormous profit. The other twelve per cent. goes to the benefit of the customer. So the dishonest jeweler gets every hundred dollars worth of goods for eighty-eight dollars, while his honest competitor has to pay the full hundred. You see how the tricky dealer can sell his goods for less and still make a bigger profit."

"It's a burning shame!" exclaimed Ted warmly "But I still don't see where you men up here in Detroit come in on this branch of smuggling. I should think that would be confined to the big seaports where the European steamers dock—New York, Boston, and the like."

"I'll tell you where we come in," replied Dalton. "As has been said, the United States demands a twenty per cent. duty on diamonds. Canada doesn't lay any duty at all on diamonds. A man can come freely to Quebec or Montreal from Europe and bring with him openly any quantity of diamonds, then from Canada can smuggle them into the United States. He's got a mighty sight easier job in

picking some place to get across on three thousand miles of border than he had of getting through the customs inspection at two or three great seaports. He can come over by rowboat or skiff or launch. He can come over in his automobile—"

"Or by airplane," suggested Ted.

"Precisely," agreed Dalton. "Oh, don't think these smugglers aren't up to snuff. They keep abreast of all modern inventions. They don't let anything slip by them. And now they've taken up the airplane."

"That's the biggest stunt of all!" exclaimed Barr. "We can catch them on the water. We can nab them on the land. But who in thunder can catch them in the air?"

"I know," put in Mr. Hapworth quietly.

The Secret Service men stared at him in amazement.

"Who?" asked Ormsby incredulously.

"Ted Scott!"

CHAPTER XVI

Strong Temptation

Ted Scott started violently in his chair at Walter Hapworth's words.

"Look here, Walter," he said, "what on earth are you trying to get me into?"

"I'm not trying to get you into anything, old boy," was the grinning reply. "Barr asked a question and I answered it. He asked who could catch the smugglers in the air. I answered 'Ted Scott.'"

"And, by Jove, he spoke the truth!" declared Barr emphatically. "If any one on earth can do it, it's Ted Scott."

"So say we all of us," put in Ormsby.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Ted. "I'm an airman, and that lets me out. I'm not a detective."

"Who says you're not?" put in Anderson. "Burnaby says there never was a detective stunt pulled off more cleverly than your rounding up of the bandits in that mail robbery out West."

"Burnaby credits me with too much," re-

plied Ted. "Lots of other fellows could have done just as well."

"He doesn't think so," rejoined Anderson. "Neither does any one of us. You've got pluck, you've got brain, you never get rattled when you're in a tight place, and when it comes to flying you're in a class by yourself."

"It's kind of you to say so," replied Ted, "and I don't deny that it appeals to my sporting blood. But as far as I can see it's wholly out of the question. I'm only on a vacation now and I've got to get back shortly to the Air Mail Service."

"I'm sure that could be easily arranged," said Barr eagerly. "You could be made a deputy in the Secret Service with full authority to make arrests or do anything else that the Secret Service men do. You'd be serving your country in a way where just now it especially needs help."

"I'm always glad to serve my country," replied Ted. "But I don't see why you couldn't easily get plenty of airmen to do the work just as well as I could do it. There's lots of them around."

"But not of your quality," put in Anderson. "We want not only flying skill but unflinching courage and honesty. Courage, because one would be brought in contact with desperate men who wouldn't hesitate to use any means to

get rid of an enemy. Honesty, because the smugglers are willing to offer huge sums to bribe government agents and there are a lot who would yield to that temptation. But everybody knows that all the money in the world couldn't tempt Ted Scott to betray his trust."

There was a murmur of applause and Ted flushed at the sincerity of the tribute.

"You fellows sure make me blush," he said with a laugh to cover his embarrassment. "But the best I can say now is that I'll think it over. It's a totally new idea and I mustn't let myself be rushed off my feet."

"Well, I suppose we shall have to be content with that for the present," said Barr reluctantly. "But don't think we're going to let you off. We'll be camping on your trail from now on and we hope it won't be long before you're one of us."

"We're especially anxious now because of recent developments," added Ormsby.

"Meaning?" said Ted inquiringly.

"Meaning Emil Kost," replied Ormsby, with a significant look at his comrades.

"Who is Emil Kost?" asked Ted.

"A thorn in the side of the Secret Service," replied Ormsby grimly. "A gentleman whom it would afford us great pleasure to lay by the heels, eh, fellows?" he asked, turning to his companions.

"Would it?" exclaimed Barr. "I'd give a year's salary to have that fellow jugged."

"Make it two years'," muttered Dalton.

"This Emil Kost seems to have soured your sweet dispositions," laughed Ted Scott, as he looked at the circle of frowning faces. "I'm curious to know more about the gentleman."

"He's a Belgian by birth," observed Barr, "and he's just about as slick an article as was ever turned out on that continent or any other. He's been engaged in diamond smuggling for years. He's a well known figure in Antwerp and Amsterdam, probably the head of the foreign smuggling ring. Our agents on the other side have kept us in touch with his movements and frequently have reported that he was the bearer of large consignments of diamonds. Again and again he's come into the port of New York, and every time we're confident he's brought over a large amount of gems. He's been stopped and searched again and again. Every inch and seam of his clothing has been gone over. We've looked for them in his bushy head of hair. We've gone over every item of his baggage, even to the handles of his toothbrushes. Did we find anything? Not a thing! He's just stood by with a sarcastic grin on his face and defied us to do our worst. Someway or other, he has got by and we've never been able to hang anything on him."

"Yet we are as certain as we are that we are alive that he brought diamonds in each time," put in Dalton.

"Sure we are," agreed Barr. "But in the absence of evidence that didn't do us any good. Still, I fancy that Kost decided that the chase was getting so hot that on the mere law of averages he'd slip up some time. So now instead of coming into New York he's transferred his operations to Canada. He brings the diamonds into Canada without any danger because there's no duty. Then all he has to consider is to get them over that long border. He does it too, by George! He's fairly flooding the American market with diamonds. We've picked him up half a dozen times on this side of the border and gone over him and his belongings, and all the time he's stood by with that maddening grin on his face making sarcastic remarks that fairly drive us wild. The name of Emil Kost to a Secret Service man is like a red rag to a bull."

"I don't wonder," observed Ted. "The man must be quite a character—even if a bad character."

"Bad is right!" snapped Anderson grimly. "That grin of his is deceiving. Two of our men have met with mysterious deaths that all of us believe could be laid at the door of Kost. But there again, as in his smuggling opera-

tions, we haven't been able to get a single shred of proof."

"A possible murderer as well as a smuggler, is he?" observed Ted. "I'm not surprised at your anxiety to catch him. But I don't see yet where the matter of airplanes comes in with Emil Kost."

"Just here," replied Barr. "The gentleman has recently taken a marked interest in flying. Taken it up as a sport, he gives out. But we're of the opinion that his idea of sport is carrying diamonds by airplane over the border from Canada into the United States."

"I see," murmured Ted. "He chooses the skies for his unlawful business. I'd like to see the skies kept clean."

"Exactly!" Barr seized the opportunity. "And who is better qualified to keep it clean than Ted Scott, the great airman?"

"I suppose that is a challenge to my sporting blood," said Ted, with a smile.

"It is," declared Barr.

"I accept the challenge!" cried the young aviator.

CHAPTER XVII

Bill Turns Up

At Ted Scott's exclamation, Barr sprang to his feet with a hearty cry of delight that was echoed by his companions.

"Bully!" he cried. "That's a promise then?"

"You can take it as such," returned Ted. "It looks to me too much like a clear duty to be disregarded. I may prove a dub at it, but I'll certainly do my best."

"Your best is good enough for anybody," answered Barr. "I'll take steps at once with the authorities to have you sworn in as a temporary deputy. But it's essential, as of course you understand, that the fact you're with us shall be kept absolutely secret. Half of your effectiveness would be gone if the smugglers had the slightest suspicion that you were connected with the Secret Service."

"I realize that fully," replied Ted. "I'll keep it strictly under my hat."

"And I, of course, will do the same," Mr Hapworth assured the others.

"Well, now, if I'm to match wits with this estimable Mr. Kost, it would be well to give me a description of him," suggested Ted.

"He's a man of medium size," replied Barr, "with a slight cast in one eye—his right one. His eyes are black in color and set rather close together. He has great physical strength and always keeps himself in the best of condition. His hair is very thick and bushy. On the left cheek there is a scar near the ear that looks as though a wound had been made originally by a knife blade. One other thing. His arms are a trifle too long for a man of his size and his hands are hairy. He dresses expensively and yet quietly. His clothes are made by the best tailors. He wears no rings or jewelry of any kind. He speaks with a slight foreign accent, but his English is good. Altogether quite the gentleman in his appearance and one you wouldn't hesitate to introduce to your friends. When he is in this city he makes his headquarters at the Ambassador Hotel. At present he's not here, but he's expected soon."

"I see," said Ted. "I'll remember every one of these details. They've been so precise that I think I'll recognize the gentleman on sight."

For nearly an hour thereafter there was an earnest conversation, in which Ted learned a lot about the smugglers and their ways, and

then the Secret Service men rose to leave, having arranged to see Ted as soon as authority arrived to swear him in as a deputy.

Left to themselves, Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth looked long at each other.

"Now you have gone and done it, you old rascal!" exclaimed Ted, grinning. "Just see what you've let me in for."

"Don't try to put it off on me," Walter laughed back. "It's true that I mentioned your name, but that didn't commit you to anything. Perhaps, however, I should have consulted you first. I spoke on impulse. I wouldn't for the world do anything that could embarrass you."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Ted. "I don't regret a bit what I agreed to do. But it's an entirely new line of work for me and I may prove a dub at it. And what about the work at the plant? I've got a lot of things on the fire there."

"That's all right. You've made marvelous progress with your designs and now it's up to the mechanical department to work them out. Besides, it will be several days, probably, before Barr gets his authority for you from the headquarters of the Secret Service, and in that time you can have explained things sufficiently to your assistants to have them go ahead with the work. Then, too, I'm of the opinion that

it won't be long before you trap Kost, and when you've done that they can't ask any more of you."

"Trap Kost or be trapped by him," replied Ted. "From all accounts, he's sure a dangerous man."

"He is that," agreed Walter gravely. "Nothing is to be gained by underestimating him. You'll have your work cut out for you. But of course you'll carry a revolver now like all the rest of the Secret Service agents."

"I suppose I'll have to," replied Ted, "though I hope I shan't have any occasion to use it."

"I hope not," returned the young business man. "But I'm betting that a time will come when you'll feel a mighty sight more comfortable with one of those things in your belt."

For the next two days Ted Scott bent to his work at the plant with redoubled energy, gathering up all the loose ends so that his absence might be felt as little as possible.

On the evening of the second day he was leaving the works when he almost ran into the arms of a man who was passing. He drew back with a word of apology and then his face lighted with pleasure as he met the eyes of Bill Twombley.

"Bill! You old rascal!" he cried, as he wrung his friend's extended hand. "What

good wind blew you up this way? You're as welcome as the flowers in May."

"Tickled to death to see you, old boy," returned Bill, with a broad grin on his good-natured face. "I'd have hunted you up if I hadn't happened to run across you."

"Have you recovered from your burns?" asked Ted.

"Practically, yes," replied Bill. "But the department figured that I ought to have a month's rest after the doctors let go of me and before I resumed work, and you can be sure that I didn't say no. So here I am with a few weeks on my hands and nothing to do but to kill time."

"Bully!" exclaimed Ted. "I'm glad you've chosen Detroit as the place to kill it in. Come right along to dinner with me now and we'll have a good old-fashioned chinfest."

Bill protested that he was not dressed very fashionably for dining at a hotel. But Ted would have none of that, and in a few minutes they were doing justice to a sumptuous meal at a table in a corner of the dining room.

"What are you doing in this part of the country?" asked Bill curiously.

In a few words Ted explained the reason for his coming with Walter Hapworth to Detroit.

"By the way!" he exclaimed. as a thought

struck him, "if you want to, Bill, you can easily rake in a good pile of coin by helping us at the works—taking up planes to test them and things like that. I've got to be away on a little special mission and you could take my place in that sort of work. What you don't know about planes isn't worth knowing."

"I'm only in the kindergarten class compared with you," replied Bill, "but anything of that kind I can do I'll be glad to do. I don't call flying work. I call it fun."

"Same here," laughed Ted. "That'll take a load off my mind. We'll go round and see Walter in the morning. He'll be mighty pleased to get you."

"Where did you tell me you were going?" asked Bill.

"Just on a little special work," replied Ted. "I'd tell you in a minute, Bill, only I'm pledged to keep it under my hat. But I don't expect to be away very long."

"Righto," replied Bill. "By the way, have you run across any of the old flying boys here?"

"Only one," replied Ted, "and I wasn't any too glad to see him. Had a mix-up with him and his gang. Name is Hardwick. One of the fellows, you know, that took part in the endurance contest. Do you know him?"

"Sure I know him," replied Bill. "Bad egg! So he tried to do you up, did he? Tell me about it."

To his friend's attentive ears Ted Scott told the facts of the street assault in which Hardwick had been the leader.

"So you licked the six of them!" said Bill admiringly. "Gee, that must have been a scrap worth looking at!"

"It was pretty lively while it lasted," admitted Ted. "But you just said he was a bad egg. I'll admit that without argument. But what do you know about him?"

"Plenty," declared Bill grimly.

CHAPTER XVIII

Finding a Clue

"Yes," went on Bill Twombley, still speaking of Hardwick, "I could be arrested for violent language in a public place if I told what I thought of that fellow. He's been mixed up in all sorts of shady deals. He's a disgrace to the flying profession. Perhaps it's enough to say that he was at one time a close pal of Check Dorp."

"Check Dorp!" exclaimed Ted Scott. "Why, he was the fellow I nabbed in Australia, the head of that gang of mail robbers."

"Sure thing," agreed Bill. "This Check Dorp and Hardwick were as thick as two thieves. Then they had a falling out about something, probably a disagreement over the division of their stealings, and they separated. Hardwick has always managed to keep two jumps ahead of the police and they never could pin anything on him. But I'll bet a dollar to a plugged nickel that, if justice were done, Hardwick would be behind the bars just as Check Dorp is."

"That confirms the impression that I had of

him," declared Ted. "In that endurance race he tried foul play against me and came within an ace of succeeding."

"He's bad medicine," pronounced Bill. "By the way, it's funny Hardwick's name should come up in our talk just now, for I caught sight of the dirty rascal only a few hours ago."

"Is that so?" asked Ted with quickened interest. "Just what was he doing?"

"Chinning with a fellow in a corner of the railroad station," replied Bill. "They must have come in on the same train as I did. They took seats in a far corner of the station and were talking away in low tones with their heads close together. Probably cooking up some mischief or other. The fellow Hardwick was talking to was dressed up to the nines but he had a wicked eye. Foreigner of some kind, I figured."

"A foreigner!" exclaimed Ted, as a thought flashed into his mind. "How did he look?"

Bill pondered for a moment.

"I didn't take much notice," he said finally. "He had black bushy hair. His eyes were a bit crooked. That's about all I remember—no, there was another thing. There was a scar on his cheek. Looked as though it might have been made by a knife."

"Kost!" breathed Ted involuntarily.

"What did you say?" asked Bill.

"Just talking to myself," answered Ted evasively. "Well, we'll let Hardwick go and talk about something pleasanter. The very name leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

The conversation drifted into other channels and it was late when they separated. The next morning Bill went with Ted to the works and, as Ted had known, Mr. Hapworth was delighted to secure Bill's services for the next few weeks while Ted should be away.

Bill's revelation had stirred Ted profoundly. The description of the stranger fitted Kost so well that Ted had little doubt as to his identity.

Kost, the smuggler! Hardwick, the aviator! A perfect combination for the smuggling of diamonds over the border by airplane!

The coincidence was too striking to be without significance and Ted blessed the lucky chance that had caused him to run across Bill Twombley. Here in his hand was a clue that might help in unraveling the mystery and in fulfilling his mission.

As soon as opportunity offered, Ted revealed to Walter Hapworth the information he had got from Bill. His friend agreed with him that it might prove of prime importance. He was grave when he heard of what the aviator had said of Hardwick's past.

"If he is as tough as Bill thinks he is, he is

just the kind of man that Kost could use," Walter said. "You remember what Barr said about Kost being a killer. The man seems to be utterly without conscience. Hardwick might not go so far as to commit murder himself, but he would probably be deaf, dumb and blind while Kost did it. I tell you, Ted, you've got to be prepared for anything when you run up against those men."

Barr voiced the same opinion when he called upon Ted the next evening at his hotel.

"They're a dangerous team," he said, "if indeed they are planning to work together and Twombley wasn't mistaken in his description of Kost. We'll keep our eyes on both of them from this time forth. The only trouble is that you'll be away patrolling the border and we may find it hard to communicate to you anything we may learn."

"Set your mind at rest as to that," replied Ted. "I've had a powerful radio set installed in my plane, both for receiving and sending, and we can get in touch with each other at any minute."

"Good!" cried Barr delightedly. "I didn't know that you were familiar with radio."

"He eats it," put in Mr. Hapworth. "There's no professional radio expert that has anything on him."

"Then that makes things easier," said Barr,

with great satisfaction. "I've brought your credentials and your badge," he added, producing them from his pocket. "The badge, of course, you'll keep concealed and only show it should the occasion demand. As I said before, a lot depends on keeping your connection with the Service absolutely dark. Otherwise, you'd be trailed by their satellites just as you expect to trail them."

"You can depend on me," promised Ted. "Now just when do you want me to begin?"

"When will you be ready?" countered Barr.

"To-morrow if you like," replied Ted. "The old bus is stocked up with gas and oil and food and can start on an hour's notice."

"That's fine," replied Barr. "You can't start too soon, for there's a rumor that something is soon going to break. I don't think a week will pass before Kost will try to get those diamonds across. And I'm almost certain it will be by plane."

"Where do you want me to patrol?" asked Ted eagerly.

"I should say on a line about three hundred miles long," replied Barr thoughtfully. "I think it will be somewhere within that limit that Kost will make his attempt. You can sail back and forth on that line and watch for planes. Most of them, of course, will be flying on legitimate business, air mail, commercial

planes, and the like. But if some seem to you suspicious, devote your attention to them. You'll have powerful glasses, and with your speedy plane you ought to be able to get near enough to see something of the pilot and passengers, if there are any passengers. If you see Hardwick or Kost, follow them like a hawk. By the way, do you know Hardwick's plane when you see it?"

"I ought to," replied Ted, with a smile. "I had two or three days during the endurance contest with little else to do than to study it."

"Bully!" exclaimed Barr. "In the meantime we'll keep tabs on Hardwick and, if his plane leaves Detroit, we'll get in touch with you so that you can be doubly on the watch."

"All right," replied Ted. "Now one other thing. Suppose I catch sight of Kost and Hardwick. Just what do you want me to do?"

"Keep in sight of them," replied Barr. "When they go down, whether at a regular port or in an open field, go down with them. Show your badge. Tell them they're under arrest on suspicion. Search them and the plane. If you find the diamonds, summon any help that may be at hand or radio us and we'll send plenty of men."

"And if they show fight?" inquired Ted.

"You have your revolver," said Barr grimly.

"Don't use it unless you have to; but if it's your life or theirs use it without the slightest hesitation."

"I see," acquiesced Ted. "Now in the course of my work I may see other signs of smuggling—whiskey, drugs, or immigrants. What do you want me to do about that?"

"Nothing except to radio the facts to us," replied Barr. "We'll attend to the rest. What I'm counting on you to do is to concentrate on Kost. Let everything else go. The little fish don't so much matter. I want to get this one big fish—the head of the ring. If we get him, the ring is smashed. He's a foeman worthy of your steel. From now on it's a duel between you two."

"That simplifies things," said Ted. "I'm off to-morrow morning at the first streak of dawn. I don't want my going to be remarked."

"Good!" said Barr. "And when you come back I hope you'll have Kost's scalp hanging at your belt."

"Here's hoping," laughed Ted, as Barr rose to take his leave. "If I don't bring it back, it won't be for lack of trying."

While it was yet dark the next morning Ted Scott left the hotel and repaired to his plane, which was stored in a hangar on the flying field attached to the Hapworth plant.

He wheeled out the machine without the aid of a mechanic, true to his plan of making his departure as secret as possible.

He stroked the beautiful plane caressingly.

"We've been together in more than one tight place, old girl," he said. "I have a hunch that we may now be going to the tightest of all. You've never failed me yet. Don't fail me this time."

He made a last careful inspection, knocked away the blocks, started the motors, whizzed down the runway, and soared into the skies.

The lone eagle of the border was on the wing!

CHAPTER XIX

In Hot Pursuit

The *Browning* soared over the sleeping city, so quiet now, so busy and humming in the broad glare of day, and turned its nose toward the border line on the Canadian side.

It was with a keen feeling of elation that Ted Scott found himself once more in what almost seemed to him his native element. The fact that he was on a dangerous mission had no terrors for him. In fact, his nerves were tingling with the joy of battle. His only fear was that the battle might not come.

For after all, the chances of coming into contact with the quarry that he sought were all against him. The sky is a big place and a tiny plane is apt to be lost in immensity. With his naturally keen sight and the aid of an unusually powerful pair of field glasses, the young aviator could command a radius of perhaps twenty miles, if the weather were clear. But if the visibility were lessened by rain or mist or fog, that radius might be reduced to twenty yards. A dozen planes might cross the border and Ted never catch sight of them.

Still, he had a chance. What is more, he had a premonition of success. He was a bit superstitious, and he believed, by reason of different experiences in his varied career, that his premonitions could be relied on. In some mysterious way, he thought, coming events cast their shadows before. And just now Ted Scott had a pronounced feeling that his efforts were not going to be fruitless.

Yet the faith of the lone eagle of the border began to waver when after two days of patrolling he had discovered nothing that would aid him in his search.

He did, it is true, as he had surmised, detect several instances of other infractions of the customs laws—twice in regard to immigrants and three times concerning liquor. He carefully noted all the facts in regard to these and radioed in cipher the details to the Detroit office of the Secret Service. He was thanked for these and informed in return that measures would be taken at once to capture the offenders if possible.

Many planes he saw, also, and drew as near to them as he could in order to ascertain the identity of the pilot or the character of the machines. But they proved to be on lawful errands, most of them in the mail service, and again and again he heaved a sigh of disappointment as he realized that he was on a blind trail.

Then his pulses quickened. On the afternoon of the second day he received a wireless message from Barr:

"Hardwick has left the city in plane. Flying north by west. Look out for him."

Ted at once turned his machine in the direction indicated.

For a long time he cruised about and at last was rewarded by the sight of a plane shooting out from the horizon and flying in the course roughly indicated by Barr's message. Instantly he turned his own plane so as to describe a circle and come about in the rear of the newcomer.

Before starting, Ted had taken care to disguise the marking on his own plane so that it could not be recognized by Hardwick, and he now drew his helmet over his face so that little of it could be discerned, in case Hardwick's suspicions should be aroused.

Like a falcon after its prey, the *Browning* shot into the sky, till it was flying at a far higher altitude than the rapidly approaching plane. At the same time Ted swung it around so as not to seem to be following the same course.

As the planes neared, a thrill went through Ted Scott's veins. He recognized the plane as

the same in which Hardwick had flown in the endurance contest. His trained eye could not be mistaken.

He snatched up his glasses and fastened them upon the pilot. There was Hardwick, sure enough, at the joystick. But there was no passenger. Kost was not with him!

The young aviator felt a pang of disappointment. It was hardly likely that the Belgian would entrust a man like Hardwick with thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds. On this trip, at least, no smuggling venture was in prospect.

But might not Hardwick be going to meet Kost at some place previously agreed upon, pick him up and carry him over the border? This seemed likely enough. Kost, knowing that he was under surveillance in Detroit, would not be foolish enough to leave that city openly in an airplane. More probably he was waiting for his confederate at some rendezvous agreed upon.

Hardwick had, of course, seen Ted's plane, but had not changed his course or shown any evidence of perturbation. Ted could see that he sat with his eyes peering ahead of him and seeming to take no notice of the other occupant of the air.

After the planes had passed each other Ted changed his course, descended to a lower level,

and swung directly into the rear of Hardwick's machine. The chase was on.

The *Browning* was vastly faster than Hardwick's plane and Ted knew that whenever he wanted to he could easily overtake the suspect. But he did not want to keep too close. All that he desired was to keep the other in sight, confident that when occasion arose he could readily catch up.

The young airman had adjusted his silencer so that instead of its usual roar the engine was working with only a muffled hum. Now he took care to keep directly in the rear of Hardwick so that without craning his neck and making a decided effort the pilot in front could not detect the presence of the pursuing plane.

Ted was nearly caught when Hardwick rather abruptly changed his course and swung to the right. It was only by quick work that the skillful young aviator was able to swing his plane in the same direction in time to escape the vision of his quarry.

Then suddenly Ted Scott's heart misgave him. He detected signs of engine trouble. The motors of the *Browning* began to knock, to miss!

Ted strove desperately to remedy the trouble, but it only grew worse and the conviction forced itself upon him that he would have to make a landing.

It was maddening to have this happen at just this juncture, but there was no help for it. Only on the ground could he make the repairs that were necessary. And by the time he had made them Hardwick would have disappeared.

The young aviator groaned and looked about for a landing place. He discovered it in a field that was fairly level, and made for it. On closer sight it proved more bumpy than he had expected, and it required skillful handling to bring his plane down without injury.

This he accomplished, however, and leaped out, intent on discovering and remedying the trouble.

He found it almost instantly and was bending over it, working desperately, when he heard the whir of a plane almost directly over him. It was moving about in spirals, evidently preparing also to make a landing.

The thought flashed into Ted's mind that this pilot might be a member of the Kost gang who had detected Ted's pursuit of Hardwick, had himself followed in chase of Ted, and was now coming down to wreak vengeance on the man who was trying to thwart the smugglers' plans.

Ted Scott put his hand on his pistol and awaited developments.

They were not long in coming. The unknown pilot brought his plane down with practiced skill and came to a stop a few yards away from

the *Browning*. The pilot jumped out and ran toward Ted.

"Bill!"

"Yes, it's Bill," was the grinning reply. "I was out for a test of one of the new machines and caught sight of your plane. Knew it at once. Saw you come down and knew you had trouble of some kind. What in thunder are you doing in this neck of the woods?"

"Bill," cried Ted, "you're an angel from heaven!"

"I've been accused of many things," laughed Bill; "but no one has ever before called me an angel."

"You are, just the same," declared Ted. "Listen, Bill. Lend me your machine. You stay here and fix mine. I'll explain later when I come back. What do you say?"

"Sure thing," assented Bill. "I'd give you my head if you asked for it. Take the bus and scoot. But I'm kind of leary about the engine. 'Tisn't working so good as it might."

"I'll chance it!" cried Ted. "If I don't come back soon, take the *Browning* to Detroit. So long."

Ted jumped into Bill's plane, set it going, soared into the sky, and was off like a flash, leaving Bill Twombley gazing after him, eyes popping and mouth agape.

Hardwick's plane had vanished from sight,

but the young aviator's unerring sense of direction led him to follow as certainly as though the object of his quest had been directly before him.

Ted put on all the power of which the new plane was capable, and fifteen minutes had not passed before he caught sight of Hardwick's plane as a tiny speck that rapidly grew larger.

Ted Scott's heart leaped with exultation as every moment brought him nearer. Both planes now were flying over a large lake and the dusk was drawing on.

Then Bill Twombley's warning was justified. The engine stopped! The plane went dead! In an instant! Not dying but dead!

Then the plane began to fall!

CHAPTER XX

A Jump for Life

If he had been over land, Ted Scott could have spiraled down and made a landing. But underneath him was a great body of water and the land on its edge was shut from sight by the gathering dusk.

There was no help for it. The young aviator must jump or else go whirling down to death in the crippled plane.

He leaped to the edge of the plane, stood poised for a moment, then jumped off into space.

Even as he did so, he realized that he was not high enough to guarantee that his parachute would open in time. He had been flying at a height of less than a thousand feet. Now he would fall many hundred feet before the parachute would spread sufficiently to slow down his descent.

To be sure, he would strike water instead of land and thus avoid being crushed. But had he been higher when the jump was made, he would have been able to disengage himself from the rope as soon as he touched the water and

swim out from under the smothering embrace of the hundreds of square feet of fabric of which the parachute was composed.

All these thoughts flashed through the young aviator's mind in the twinkling of an eye during those instants of awful, breath-taking suspense as he shot down through the air.

It seemed an eternity before that descent slackened. But slacken at last it did as the parachute spread and the terrible momentum was stayed.

But by that time Ted was dangerously near the surface of the water. He could see the tossing green waves, crested with tips of foam. They seemed to him to reach up for him hungrily as though greedily gloating over their victim.

He struck the surface with a force that would have killed him had it been land. Down, down he went until it seemed that he would never stop.

As he went he struggled desperately to release his hands from the rope. It was only at the lowermost extremity of the descent that he felt his hands were free.

He struck out frantically to the right as his ascent began, hoping almost beyond hope that he would be able to get beyond the zone of the parachute before he reached the surface.

But that hope died as he emerged, choking

and sputtering, above the water. Instead of having the open sky as canopy he found himself enveloped in the smothering folds of cloth that had settled down over the water.

Ordinarily there would have been some air space between the water and the convex surface of the parachute that would have afforded him air, for a little time at least. But he had gone down so fast and so far that the cloth had been dragged down into the water. Now, soaked and sodden, it wrapped itself around him like a shroud.

He fought desperately to release himself from the deadly embrace. He felt as though he were in the grasp of an octopus. His hands and feet were tangled in the fabric as he battled.

He was already out of breath from his immersion. Now he felt as though his lungs were bursting. And the more he struggled the more heavily that shroud pressed down upon him.

It was useless to try to struggle through that zone of cloth. The only resource left was to dive so deep that it could not touch him and swim under water as far as possible before he was absolutely forced to rise to the surface.

Down he went. His head was reeling now. Lights danced before his dimming eyes. His lungs were strained to the utmost. He feared that his senses were leaving him. Only his in-

domitable will refused to confess defeat. He would fight on till the last gasp.

On and on he pursued his way, summoning all his waning strength in one last effort. Everything in him cried out to rise to the surface and breathe. But he knew that, if he once more came up and found the cloth still above him, it would be the end. He would not have enough strength to dive again and renew the struggle.

So he kept on until at last every ounce of strength left his legs and arms and the darkness of unconsciousness was coming upon him.

Then he rose to the surface; rose to find himself just outside that smothering fabric, the edge of which lay within reach of his hand; rose to draw into his tortured lungs great draughts of the blessed air; rose, weak and spent from loss of breath, but still alive!

He was too weak to swim another stroke for the moment, but he still retained enough of his senses to turn over on his back and float.

As he floated, strength gradually came back into his wearied limbs and his heart, which had been beating furiously, resumed its normal rhythm.

For a time he was content to float thus, lulled into a beatific contentment by his narrow escape. It was not for some minutes that the thought intruded itself into his numbed mind

that he had escaped one peril simply to be faced by another.

He was alone on that waste of water without any conception of how far he might be from shore. He did not know in what direction the nearer shore lay. He knew that the lake was many miles in extent.

He had no aid from the heavens in trying to get his direction. The sun had disappeared and even the glow of its aftermath had faded from the horizon. He could not tell which was east and which was west. The stars had not yet peeped out, or he might have guided himself by them. Even if they came out later, a haze that was gathering over the water might shut out his sight of them.

He shut his eyes and tried to figure out how far across the lake he had gone before the accident happened. His mind was still vague and clouded and he could not remember distinctly, but he calculated roughly that it must have been about six miles.

He was an expert swimmer, and in broad daylight and with something to guide him six miles would have been as nothing. But with all signs of direction gone he might quite as readily choose the wrong course as the right. He might be swimming up a fifty mile stretch when, if he turned in the proper course, his task would be limited to six.

Had he been sure that the fallen plane was still afloat, he would have tried to make it. But he had not the slightest conception of where it had fallen, and, besides, he feared that the weight of the heavy engine had pulled it under.

There was nothing left but to trust to chance. He had at least one chance in four of swimming toward the nearer shore wherever that might be.

So he made his choice and struck out, hoping that he was going in the right direction.

Then abruptly the heavens were illumined with a glare of light. Ted found himself in the center of a zone of blinding brilliance. Something struck the water with a hiss and vanished.

Stunned and bewildered, Ted Scott thought at first that a meteor had fallen. He stopped swimming and looked upward.

There above him was hovering a plane that he knew. The *Browning!*

Bill Twombley! Good old Bill!

CHAPTER XXI

Just in Time

For an instant Ted Scott felt as though his heart would leap from his body. His joy was so keen that it was almost pain. Here was deliverance! Here was safety!

But had he been seen? It was easy for him to discover the huge bulk of the plane standing out against the sky. But would it be equally easy for Bill to see him, his head a tiny speck in that dark waste of waters?

The answer came a moment later when a shout rang out from the plane above. There was relief in that shout, more than relief—unfeigned delight and jubilation.

Then Ted, who had now ceased swimming and was floating with his eyes fixed on the plane, saw the *Browning* come nearer to the surface in long, sweeping spirals.

Nearer and nearer it came until it was not more than thirty feet above the surface of the water. The silencer was still adjusted, so that Bill's shout could be clearly heard.

"Thanks be I've found you, Ted!" he cried "Are you hurt? Can you grab a rope?"

"Sure thing!" Ted called back. "Tit a noose in the end of it so that I can slip it under my arms and put plenty of knots in the rope so as to help me in climbing."

"Sure you won't sink while I'm doing it?" asked Bill. "It will take some time."

"That's all right," replied Ted. "I'm on my back now and I could float for hours."

Perhaps five minutes elapsed, for the pilot was in a delicate position with the *Browning* so close to the water. But at length the rope was ready and Bill leaned over the side of the plane with the rope in one hand while he picked out Ted's position with a flashlight.

"Be ready!" he called, and, coming back in a circle, he threw over the rope.

It struck the water with a splash not far from the swimming aviator and Ted, with two strokes, reached it and slipped the noose over his head and under the arms.

"All set!" he called. "Don't try to pull me up. You'll have all you can do to attend to the plane. Get down to the water as close as you dare and with all these knots to help me I'll be able to climb up by myself."

Bill brought the plane about ten feet lower, so close, in fact, that some of the spray was flung against the side of the machine, and Ted began his climb.

With the weariness of his muscles from the

strain he had undergone and his sodden clothes hampering his movements, it was an arduous task, and Ted Scott was all but exhausted when he at last reached the cockpit of the plane and with the help of Bill's extended hand drew himself over the side.

He slumped down with a sigh of infinite relief. Not a word was said at the moment. Ted was too exhausted to speak and Bill too engrossed with the machine. But though their lips were silent, their hearts were singing.

Bill pulled on the stick and the *Browning* shot upward until it had reached a height of two thousand feet. Then, having brought it to an even keel, Bill turned to Ted and extended his hand.

"Shake," he said.

Ted grasped the hand fervently and for one long moment the comrades looked into each other's eyes.

"Bill," said Ted, "a little while ago I said you were an angel. I'll go that one better. You're two angels."

Bill Twombley grinned.

"I can almost hear the music of the celestial choir," he chuckled, "and there's something on my shoulders that feels like sprouting wings. But gee, Ted," and his voice lost its light note, "I can't tell you how I feel to see you safe and sound again. You sure had a narrow squeak."

"Narrow squeak is right," agreed Ted. "A few minutes ago my chances for life didn't seem to be worth a copper cent. I thought I might have to swim all night, and already the chill of the water was beginning to cramp my muscles. I doubt if I could have lasted much longer. But tell me just how you happened to be coming along. I thought you'd be on your way to Detroit by this time."

"It was just because I was leary of that old engine," explained Bill. "It hadn't been working right, and when I saw that you were going over the water I thought it might go dead on you. So just as soon as I had fixed this bus—it only took a few minutes—I made up my mind to follow you until you got over the water, anyway. Then I caught a glimpse of something white in the water and made out that it was the plane you had been flying. I knew then that what I had feared had happened. I thought that if you'd survived you'd be round here in the water somewhere, and so I let down a flare. Gee, Ted, you can't know how I felt when I picked out your old head down there in the waves and knew that you were still alive!"

"Those born to be hanged can't be drowned," replied Ted, grinning. "I guess that explains it."

"No use, I suppose, keeping on after that

slick fellow you were chasing, is there?" asked Bill.

"No," replied Ted sadly. "In this darkness we wouldn't find him in a thousand years. Just turn the nose of the plane toward Detroit. There I'll rest, get fresh clothes, and make a new start to-morrow morning."

Bill did as directed, and the *Browning* zipped along like a meteor. She tore off a hundred and twenty miles an hour and reached the city before ten o'clock that night.

"Good-night, old man," said Ted, as the two climbed out of the cockpit. "You're all wool and a yard wide. I'll never forget how you saved my life."

"Do you happen to remember how you saved mine?" returned Bill, as he shook hands. "I'm glad I've had a chance to pay part of the debt at least. Now you slip along and hit the hay while I put this old bus in the hangar."

But Ted Scott, tired as he was, was in no mood to "hit the hay." He hailed a taxi and was whirled to his hotel. There he hastily told Mr. Hapworth what had happened and asked him to summon Barr at once. In the meantime, Ted took a shower, changed his clothes and had a hasty meal, so that he was ready when Barr arrived, accompanied by Ormsby.

Ted greeted them with a wry smile.

"As a detective, I'm a pretty fair airman,"

he said. "Had my man where I wanted him and then let him slip." Then while they listened intently he told the happenings of the afternoon and evening.

"So you can see how sore I feel," he finished. "I lost my man and he's safely over the border long before this time."

"No fault of yours," declared Barr emphatically. "You did all that a human being could do. You couldn't help your plane going dead. It was just one of the breaks in the game."

"But if he got any diamonds across!" murmured Ted.

"I don't think he did," broke in Ormsby. "It would be a different matter if Kost had been with him. But that wily snake would never have entrusted any large sum to a fellow like Hardwick. Ten to one that fellow didn't have a particle of smuggled goods with him."

"Ormsby is right," put in Barr. "What I think is this: Hardwick was just on a scouting trip to find some place on the other side of the border where he could land his plane in safety when the big test should come. You see, if he landed at any regular airport he would have to submit to a customs search. But if Hardwick can find a good open field in some sparsely settled region miles perhaps from any house, it would be an easy matter to land. Then, on foot or in a motor car, they could travel along

like any ordinary travelers and the trick would be done. They would be in the States, quiet and serene, and the customs would have been evaded once more. No, you can make up your mind to it that the real attempt is yet to come."

"Well, I'll be on the job again bright and early to-morrow morning," said Ted.

"I don't think you'd better," said Barr. "I'll tell you why. We've had news from Antwerp that a partner of Kost's has left there on a Canadian steamer that will dock at Quebec to-morrow. We'll have our men there trying to spot him when he lands. Of course we can't do anything to him, for its perfectly legal to bring diamonds into Canada without paying duty. But we'll try to trail him, for there's no doubt that he's bringing them over for Kost and the two will soon get together.

"So that by to-morrow night we may have news for you that will give you a pointer as to where to look. In the meantime take a good rest, for you surely need it, not only because of what you've undergone but what may be yet to come."

"It will be a big thing for the Service if we pinch Kost this time," remarked Ormsby, "for our man on the other side has cabled us in code that this partner of Kost's is bringing over a million dollars' worth of diamonds."

"A million dollars' worth!" Ted's eyes

sparkled. "Gee, but that will be a haul worth making if we can nab the skunk!"

"Skunk, sure enough," agreed Barr. "But don't forget that that special skunk has some of the qualities of the tiger. That goes, too, for Vandenken."

"Who is Vandenken?" asked Ted.

"This accomplice of Kost's who's coming over with the gems," replied Barr. "He is cruel and ferocious, said to be one of the most dangerous men in Europe. He and Kost are both known as killers."

"A nice genial pair!" ejaculated Ted.

"As bad as they make them," observed Barr, rising from his seat. "It's understood then that you just rest until you hear from us. We'll let you know anything as soon as we learn it ourselves. Go to bed now and sleep the clock around."

This Ted did without demur and strictly fulfilled the injunction as to time.

But it was a crestfallen Barr that met him the next afternoon.

"Why so glum?" asked Ted.

"Reason enough," growled Barr. "That fellow Vandenken has given our men the slip. Couldn't identify him among the passengers of the ship that docked yesterday. Yet we had positive information from the other side that he shipped on that steamer. He may have got

over the side into a small boat as the ship was nearing port, or else he was so cunningly disguised that he defied detection. The main thing is that we didn't find hair or hide of him. That is, so far. Better news may come in later. Stay here in the city a little while longer."

It was depressing news, for Ted was tuned up for what promised to be a stirring adventure.

To get his mind off of his disappointment and to stretch his legs after his long confinement in his plane the young aviator went out for a stroll that evening. The air was bracing, the weather fine, and he prolonged his walk until he found himself outside the city limits.

There were no pavements and his feet made no sound on the soft dirt road. He was about to turn back when his eye was caught by the sight of two figures a little way ahead of him. He looked at them carelessly for a moment, and then his indifference vanished. By the walk of one of them, he recognized Hardwick!

CHAPTER XXII

Stealthy Plotting

In an instant Ted Scott submerged himself in the shadow of a high hedge that bordered the road.

The two men had their heads together and were engaged in an animated conversation as they neared an old dilapidated house that stood apart from its neighbors. It seemed to be deserted, as no lights shone from the windows, though the night was comparatively young.

Keeping in the shadows, Ted followed them as closely as he dared until he saw them go up the steps to the porch of the house. Hardwick's companion drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. The pair passed in and the door closed behind them.

Ted waited until he saw a light flash from a window on the second floor. It was a feeble light, however, and was immediately obscured by the hasty drawing of a curtain.

Ted drew near cautiously, went up the steps on tiptoe, and tried the door. It was locked.

He stole around to the rear of the house and

found a kitchen window that yielded to his touch. He raised it and swung himself over the sill.

He drew from his pocket the flashlight he always carried and, carefully shading it, swept it around the room. As he had surmised, it was empty. Not only that, but it had been empty for a long time, as was attested by the moldy smell and the festoons of cobwebs on the walls and ceiling. It was evidently one of the old houses that would never be lived in again, but was waiting to be demolished to make room for new houses in a growing suburb.

As silently as a panther, Ted made his way from the kitchen, as this room evidently had been, toward the front of the house. At the foot of the stairs leading to the floor above he stopped and listened.

He could hear a faint murmur of voices coming from one of the rooms. If they had been clearer, he would have waited where he was, for he knew the danger that attended any attempt to mount those creaking stairs. But the words were indistinguishable.

Feeling to make sure that his revolver was in its proper place, Ted removed his shoes and started his ascent, moving with the greatest caution and feeling each step as he put his foot upon it. The slightest noise might prove his undoing.

Twice there was a creak that made the young airman pause and hold his breath for a sound from the room upstairs that might betoken alarm. But no such sound came, and he continued up the stairs until he stood upon the landing. A light coming from under the door of one of the rooms indicated where Hardwick and his companion were.

By the aid of his flashlight Ted saw that the door of the room adjoining was standing ajar. He slipped into this and found himself in darkness. Not utter darkness, however, for a faint light penetrated through a crack in the wall from the next room.

He applied his eye to the crack and found to his delight that it afforded him an excellent view of the occupants of the adjoining room.

That room was as bare as the rest, except for an old table and a couple of battered chairs. On the table a candle was burning.

Hardwick was sitting on one side of the table with his back toward Ted. But Ted paid small attention to him. His eyes were riveted on the face of Hardwick's companion.

An evil face it was; despite its veneer of polish and social experience, a cruel face. The eyes had a glint in them that would have fitted a beast of prey. The hands at the edge of his cuffs were unusually hairy. There was a cast

in one eye and a livid scar on his left cheek.

Ted Scott's heart beat high with excitement.

Kost! Kost, without a doubt!

It was Kost who was speaking, and Ted listened with all his ears.

"So you think you've found a safe place for landing?" he asked, with a slight trace of foreign accent. "Are you perfectly sure? It is not well for any one who works for me to make mistakes," and there was a threat in his tone that was not lost on Hardwick, who shifted uneasily in his chair.

"It's perfectly safe, Mr. Kost," declared Hardwick. "A good easy place for a landing, with thick woods on every side and not a house within three miles. I would stake my life that we can land there without being noticed by any one."

"You're certain, are you, that you weren't followed on this trip?" was the next question.

"Dead sure," asserted Hardwick emphatically. "Everything is as right as right can be."

"I hope you're right," said Kost. "But bear in mind that what I will be carrying will be worth fighting for and that nothing is going to stand in my way if detected. Dead men tell no tales. A good theory to work on, don't you think?"

"I don't know," replied Hardwick uncom-

fortably. "I don't want to get mixed up in any killing."

"You put it crudely, my friend," said Kost, baring his teeth in a sinister smile. "Who spoke of killing? Sometimes men die accidentally. A Secret Service man might unfortunately get in the way of a bullet, and that would be very regrettable. But let us hope no such misfortune will happen. In case it does, all you'll have to do will be to be deaf and blind and, especially, dumb. You'll be well paid for being dumb. But enough of this. I have received word through secret channels that my friend, Mr. Vandenken, has landed safely in Canada. He is making his way toward the island that you know. There you and I will meet him and get the fortune in diamonds that he carries. You're sure you can find the place?"

"I'm pretty sure," replied Hardwick rather dubiously. "It's a bad place to land. Just swarming with rattlesnakes."

"All the better for that," replied Kost. "The snakes cause people to give it a wide berth. There isn't a soul within miles of there, and no one will see our plane land and come up again. But you do not seem to be very sure that you can find it again. Let me refresh your memory."

Emil Kost drew a pencil and paper from

his pocket and sketched a rude diagram, over which both bent intently.

"Do you see?" asked Kost at length.

"I've got it in my head all right now," replied Hardwick. "I'll find it without any trouble."

"This is Tuesday," said Kost. "Mr. Vandenken will be there on Thursday. We must get there on the same day so that there may be no delay, for it is barely possible that Secret Service men may get wind of his whereabouts. Have your plane ready to start with us the instant I give the word."

"Count on me," Hardwick assured him, "and you won't be—what was that noise?"

Ted, in his attempt to catch a glimpse of the diagram, had shifted his position and pressed upon a loose board which gave forth a mournful creak.

"Rats, probably," replied Kost. "The house is full of them. But we'll look to make sure."

He rose to his feet and moved toward the door. In lifting the candle the sheet of paper was knocked to the floor.

Ted darted into a closet near by, pulled the door shut and drew his revolver.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Rendezvous

The next moment the door of the room in which Ted Scott was concealed was flung open and Kost swept the light of the candle around.

"Nothing here," he said. "I told you it was rats. Still, to make certain we'll look in the other two rooms."

Ted could hear the two men moving about for a minute or two, and then the pair returned to the room they had left and Kost set the candle down on the table.

"You couldn't have picked out a rottener dump than this," grumbled Hardwick. "It gives me the creeps."

"Your nerves are jumpy, my friend," remarked Kost. "I took special care in selecting this dump, as you call it, to hold our conference in. A hotel room might have dictaphones or some other device concealed in it. This place is dreary and deserted and has the reputation of being haunted. Everybody gives it a wide berth."

"Haunted!" exclaimed Hardwick, looking around uneasily.

Kost laughed.

"Afraid of ghosts, are you?" he said. "Well, to set your mind at rest we won't stay here any longer. I've told you all that I wanted to say. Thursday, then, is the day. Weather will make no difference. In fact, the worse the weather, the better, as there will be fewer planes abroad. Come along."

He rose and blew out the candle and Ted, in the closet, could hear their feet descending the stairs.

Not till the door slammed shut and he heard the grinding of the key in the lock did Ted Scott emerge from the closet and enter the room in which the conference had just been held.

Cautiously drawing aside the curtain, he made out the two figures going down the road. Only after they had disappeared around a bend did he venture to turn on the flashlight and sweep the floor of the room.

He gave a subdued exclamation of delight when he saw the forgotten scrap of paper lying on the floor. He pounced upon it and scanned it eagerly. But at the moment the rude scrawling figures and lines conveyed to him no meaning.

There was no time to study it at the moment, and he thrust the paper in his pocket. Then he put on his shoes, went down the stairs into

the kitchen, and dropped to the ground from the window by which he had entered.

He described a wide circle in reaching the populous section of the city, then hailed a cab and was carried to his hotel.

Walter Hapworth was at a trade banquet and would not be back probably till long past midnight. Ted secured the latest and best maps of Canada he could find and, spreading them out on his table, compared them with the diagram that Kost had sketched.

At first the latter seemed like a puzzle. There were no names of rivers or places that would give any indication of the whereabouts of the mysterious island where Kost and Hardwick were to meet Vandenken.

But if there were no names, there were lines leading in a general direction west by north from Detroit. At the point where these lines converged was a small figure that Ted took to be the island in question. This conviction was heightened by the fact that all around the spot Kost had drawn a series of waving lines that seemed designed to indicate water. In general the island seemed to be shaped like a golf stick.

This then was Ted Scott's problem, to set out on a scouting expedition in the general direction indicated and trust to good fortune to discover an island that would fit the description.

It was exceedingly vague and indefinite, and Ted knew well that he might sail around in the air for many days before he could find the place. On the other hand, he might happen upon it at any time. He must take his chance.

Even if he did not find the island, he knew Hardwick's plane by sight and he might come across the conspirators in the air.

By the time he had gleaned all he could from the diagram it was past midnight. He was entering upon Wednesday. It was on Thursday that the attempt to smuggle in the diamonds was to be made. Every instant was precious.

He called up Barr and found that he was out of town and would not be back until the following morning. Ted was not sorry to hear this. He wanted to play a lone hand without interference or suggestions that might make all his plans go awry.

In truth, he was obsessed by the feeling that he had struck a winning lead, and experience had taught him that he could handle things better alone than in company with others. As the lone eagle of the Atlantic, he had flown to Paris. As the lone eagle of the border, he would carry through his duel with Kost and his rascally associates.

He left a brief note for Mr. Hapworth, saying that he was called suddenly from town and hoped for luck. Then he left the hotel and made

his way to the flying field, at that time of night silent and deserted except for a watchman, who, after the immemorial tradition of watchmen, was placidly sleeping.

Ted rolled the *Browning* out of her hangar, adjusted the silencer so that his take-off would attract as little attention as possible, whizzed down the runway, and the lone eagle was off.

In his previous days of scouting Ted had pretty thoroughly covered the territory within two hundred miles of Detroit and was quite sure that nothing answering the description and shape of Kost's island had met his eyes. He felt reasonably safe, therefore, in traveling that far in the dark, so that at the first streak of dawn he would be on the verge of the territory that he had not yet explored.

This he achieved without difficulty, and as soon as daylight came he settled down to survey the country as with a microscope, letting nothing, however minute, escape him.

North, east, south and west he sailed over a district hundreds of square smiles in extent. Then he would cut across diagonally in the prescribed area. But search as closely as he did, nothing that answered the conditions of his quest came into view.

Morning merged into noon, noon into mid-afternoon and still his search was fruitless. Then, about an hour before dusk, his pulses

thrilled as he beheld a long island in what seemed to be a river but might be a small lake in a very wild and uninhabited district.

He brought his plane lower, snatched his glasses and scrutinized the place closely. The only sign of human habitation on the island was a small hut that seemed almost to be falling to pieces. The distance from the mainland to the long side of the island seemed to be about two hundred yards.

As Ted looked he saw a man emerge from the hut. He was too far off for his features to be discerned but Ted noted that he was tall and powerfully built. His clothes were not those of a farmer. He seemed to be entirely alone on the island.

"Vandenken," thought Ted to himself, now convinced that he had located the place where the delivery of diamonds was to be effected.

Lest suspicion be aroused, he did not hover over the island, but kept the plane going at full speed as though it were intent on reaching some distant destination. It was not till he was twenty miles away that he slackened speed and considered the situation.

He had noted that there was no place on the island where a plane could land. It would be necessary, therefore, for Hardwick to bring his machine down on the mainland and then cross in a boat.

Ted waited till it was nearly dark, but not so dark that he could not see to effect a landing. Then, flying very low, he came back and landed in a comparatively level field. He rolled the *Browning* into the shelter of a neighboring bit of woodland. Then he set out on foot down the shore of the water until he was nearly opposite the hut on the island.

There he came across a canoe hidden in the bushes, waiting, no doubt, for Hardwick and Kost to ferry themselves to the island.

A great tree stood near by. Its heavy foliage would afford a secure hiding place.

Ted stood for a while pondering the situation. Then he went back to his plane, got out his sandwiches and thermos bottle of coffee, and made a satisfying meal. After assuring himself that the plane was in readiness for instant flight, he made his way back to the vicinity of the canoe.

He could have hidden in the thick bushes that bordered the stream, had he cared to. But already he had discovered that rattlesnakes, as Hardwick had said, abounded in the district. Twice he had seen ugly forms gliding through the grass and once only an angry rattle had prevented his stepping on one of them. He had jumped back in time, but he had learned his lesson. The tree would be safer than the ground.

So he shinned up the trunk and ensconced himself in the branches. Thursday, Kost had said, but had indicated no hour. Thursday would be any time after midnight. Ted was going to be on hand.

It was a dreary vigil in the tree and the hours seemed endless. Ted's nerves were too taut to admit of drowsiness. He had never been so vital and alert.

It was still two hours before dawn when he heard the distant humming of a plane. It came nearer and he could hear the scrape of the wheels as it landed not far away. Then two figures that were simply deeper blots on the darkness passed beneath the tree.

There was the gleam of a flashlight as they searched for and found the canoe. They untied it, stepped in, and Ted heard the splash of paddles.

Ted Scott waited till he heard the canoe scrape against the further shore. Then he slipped down from the tree, dived into the water and headed for the island.

CHAPTER XXIV

Rattlesnake Pit

Ted Scott was under no delusions as to the risk he ran in approaching the island.

On that island, far remote from human interference, were three ruthless enemies, two of whom would kill him with as little compunction as they would a fly, while the third, if not taking part in actual murder, would not lift a finger to stay the others.

He knew this, but kept on without hesitation. He was intent on learning their plans, the course they intended to follow, the place where they purposed to land. Once knowing those plans, he counted on his own brains and resolution to thwart them.

In a few minutes he reached the shore. He wrung the water from his dripping garments as well as he could and stealthily approached the hut, from the one window of which the flare of a candle sent its light out into the darkness.

On hands and knees he crept near it and inch by inch raised himself until he could look into the room.

Around a table were gathered three men, two

of whom Ted already knew. The third, whom he conjectured to be Vandenken, sat facing him.

He was a man much larger than either of the others and possessed evidently of great muscular strength. His face was villainous in the extreme and scarred with every evil passion. One glance at it would tell any one that the man would stop at nothing.

At the moment the faces of all were wreathed with smiles as they looked at a bulky wallet that lay on the table.

"So you got here all right and brought the sparklers with you," said Kost, licking his lips with satisfaction. "There's nobody like you, Vandenken. We'll have the customs men foaming at the mouth when they learn that we've carried through this deal."

Vandenken smiled at the tribute and snapped his fingers.

"That for the customs men!" he sneered. "They're a pack of fools. It's as easy—what is it that the Americans say?—as easy as taking candy from a baby."

"We've beaten them every time so far, and this will be the climax," laughed Kost. "But let's have a look at the gems. I'm hungry to feast my eyes on the beauties."

Vandenken unstrapped the wallet and a perfect cascade of glittering diamonds rolled out on the table. They were fairly dazzling in

their coruscating radiance. Ted could readily believe they were worth the million dollars that had been given as their value.

"Isn't that a sight worth looking at?" breathed Vandenken. "They fairly take your breath away. Just gloat over those while I go into the next room and bring out a bottle. We'll drink to a safe trip over the border."

His form vanished beyond the doorway of the room.

A moment later something leaped out of the darkness and came down heavily on Ted Scott's head. He went down like a log.

How long afterward it was before he came to himself Ted Scott did not know. It could not have been daylight, for the candle was still burning.

His head was aching and there was dried blood on his face that had trickled down from a gash in his scalp. He was lying on the floor on his back, his arms and legs tightly bound.

As his dimmed eyes cleared, he saw the gaze of the three men riveted upon him. In those of Kost and Vandenken were the venom of snakes. In Hardwick's was a less virulent enmity, but enmity nevertheless, tinctured with a shade of uneasiness.

Ted saw that Kost held a shining object in his hand. He recognized it as his Secret Serv-

ice badge that had been torn from the inside of his vest.

Vandenken indulged in a gloating laugh when he saw that Ted had recovered consciousness.

"Another simpleton who thought he could match his wits against ours," he chuckled. "Thought my eyesight was poor so that I couldn't detect him crouching at the window. Well, he's made his last mistake. My club didn't finish him, but this—" he drew a murderous looking knife from his belt and ran his finger along the edge.

"Just a minute, Vandenken," interposed Kost smoothly. "Of course he must die—" here Hardwick made a gesture of protest but subsided instantly as Kost bent a baleful glare upon him— "but not by the knife or revolver. That would be too easy. Besides, there's nothing in the world harder to hide than a dead body."

He paused for a moment. Ted remained silent.

"Let me see," and Kost's smile was deadly. "Didn't I understand that there was a place on this island called Rattlesnake Pit?"

"Yes," replied Vandenken eagerly, catching the drift of the question. "Came across it yesterday while strolling about. An old abandoned well that's just alive with rattlers.

You can hear the rattles going when you're fifty feet away."

"Just the place," stated Kost, with an evil smile. "Now, Vandenken, you're such a powerful brute that it would be easy for you to carry this gentleman, whose charming society, by the way, we'll be sorry to miss—" here he made a mocking bow to Ted— "the few hundred yards that lie between here and the pit and lay him down at the edge. Then if you should happen to stumble and knock against him so that he should topple over, that would be a misfortune that we would never cease to grieve over but that we should have to endure. I am sure that you agree with me, Vandenken?"

Ted felt a horrible chill stealing through his veins. So this was the hideous death reserved for him—to be hurled, bound, into a mass of rattlesnakes! Torture worthy of the fiends they were.

Still he remained mute and faced Kost with scornful and unflinching eyes in which was no trace of pleading.

"It will be great sport," averred Vandenken. "You're a genius, Kost."

"So I've been told," replied Kost complacently. "Well, now, as time is pressing, you'd better get to work at once. We'll probably be gone before you get back. Later on meet me in

New York and we'll make the division of the profits agreed on."

Vandenken bent over and lifted up Ted's bound body. Hardwick again made a move as though to protest, but Kost fixed him with the glare of a basilisk and he relapsed into silence.

With marvelous ease Vandenken moved along. He seemed to have the strength of a gorilla and was scarcely panting when after a journey of ten minutes he laid his burden down at the edge of the ominous pit.

Vandenken straightened up and with his flashlight sent a gleam into the pit.

The reptiles, disturbed by the light, were sending up a horrid din of rattles.

Vandenken stooped to lift Ted and hurl him over.

Like a flash, Ted Scott drew up his legs and gave Vandenken a terrific blow in the chest.

Under the impact of that kick the scoundrel tottered back, teetered an instant on the edge of the pit, and then, with a hideous scream, fell down amid the writhing mass of reptiles!

CHAPTER XXV

Captured

Shriek after shriek, blood-curdling shrieks, arose from the doomed man as he struggled in that awful, twisting, tangled mass of rattlesnakes, who were all over him at once, darting their fangs into him in a hundred places while their angry rattles blended with his screams.

Ted Scott was paralyzed with horror. Vile as the scoundrel was, he would have tried to save him if he could. But Ted knew that the rascal was now far beyond mortal help. Even if pulled from the pit, he would die in a few minutes.

Doubtless those screams had been heard at the hut, and Ted could imagine Kost's lips curling in fiendish glee as he listened to what he would believe to be the shrieks of his victim.

In his struggles to maintain his balance on the edge of the pit, Vandenken's knife had fallen from his belt and now lay only a few feet away.

Ted wriggled his body toward it and picked up the haft with his teeth. Then he sawed away at the bonds on his hands until they were

severed. It was an easy matter then to free himself of the rope that bound his ankles.

He stood up straight and stretched his arms. Once more free!

By this time the screams from the pit had ceased, although the angry whir of rattles was still continuous. Vandenken was dead. The horrible fate he had planned for another had fallen upon himself.

Ted's course of action lay straight before him. He must regain his plane at once. The day was beginning to break now and he could not venture in sight of the hut. He must swim across from where he was.

He dived into the water and in a few minutes had reached the mainland. As he drew himself up he caught sight of Hardwick's plane in an open space not far away. The conspirators had not yet left the hut.

Even as he reached this conclusion, he saw Kost and Hardwick emerge from the doorway. As Kost had said, they had not expected to await the return of Vandenken. Doubtless they thought that he was at this moment crouched on the edge of the pit, rejoicing over the sight below.

Taking advantage of the trees and bushes that grew thickly along the edge of the stream, Ted made his way to his plane and rolled it out from its hiding place. A bend in the stream

hid it from the spot where Hardwick's plane was standing.

Listening closely, he heard the splash of paddles. A few minutes later he could hear Hardwick tuning up his motor. They were ready to start.

And with them was a million dollars' worth of diamonds!

Hardwick took the air with a roar. Ted took it a minute later with a hum, his silencer working to perfection.

Once in the sky, Hardwick turned the nose of his plane straight toward the border line between the United States and Canada. Ted followed, moderating his speed so as to keep as far behind as he could and yet not lose sight of the plane in front.

He reflected as he sped along that the tragedy of the pit had worked to his advantage. Kost and Hardwick believed him dead. They had disposed, so they thought, of the only airman employed, as far as they knew, in the Secret Service. So that, even if they should catch a glimpse of his plane, it would not arouse suspicion.

Three hours passed before they reached the border. Over the line they shot and Ted exulted. They were in the territory of the United States. He could make an arrest now. Of

course his warrant was powerless in the Dominion of Canada.

Shortly after crossing the border, Hardwick turned the direction of his plane a little toward the right. Ted followed, confident now that it would be but a little time before his enemies would attempt a landing.

He drew up a little closer and at the same time rose to a higher level in order to effect the strategy he had in view, for the most ticklish part of his program was at hand. Hardwick, knowing his chosen location, would have to descend first. Ted would have to wait upon his decision and come down next.

But with Hardwick and Kost fully armed on the ground, they could send a hail of bullets against the *Browning* while Ted was attempting to make his landing. He might be killed before he would be free to make his own defence.

From a pouch at the side of the plane Ted drew out a half a dozen objects, each something like a hand grenade.

"It's time Hardwick had a taste of his own medicine," he said to himself grimly.

They were flying now in a wild part of the country, almost destitute of inhabitants, and Ted could see by the slowing down of Hardwick's plane that he was near his chosen loca-

tion. It came in sight shortly, a broad plateau surrounded by thick woods.

The daring young aviator had drawn up directly above Hardwick's plane, and he shut off most of his power when he saw that Hardwick had done the same and was descending.

Gaging his distance, Ted Scott dropped one of the cylindrical objects. It burst abreast of Hardwick's cockpit.

It was a tear bomb, one that inflicts no permanent injury but brings the tears to the eyes in such volume that the owner is temporarily blinded.

There was a volley of shouts and objurgations from the occupants of the plane and the machine wobbled frightfully. But it was now so near the ground that the landing was finally managed.

Two more of the bombs struck the ground as Kost and Hardwick tumbled out and increased their demoralization. They yelled and staggered about like drunken men, rubbing their eyes, from which the tears came in ever increasing volume.

Ted made a deft and swift landing and came running up to the two rascals with revolver drawn.

"Hold up your hands!" he shouted.

"A ghost!" shrieked Hardwick, as he recognized the voice. But he obeyed promptly.

"You, too," Ted commanded Kost.

The latter spat out a defiance and fumbled for his revolver. Ted leaped forward and caught the rascal with his fist on the point of the jaw. Kost went down like a felled ox.

Ted went through the Belgian's pockets and took from them a revolver and a knife. Then he jerked Hardwick's weapon from his belt and threw it to a distance.

"Now, you skunk," he commanded the latter, "take this rope and bind Kost's hands behind his back."

Under the muzzle of the weapon Hardwick obeyed, his eyes having cleared enough to perform the task.

"Now lie down on your face and put your hands behind you," ordered Ted.

Hardwick did so and Ted trussed him up securely.

Only then did he draw a long breath. His enemies had been delivered into his hands!

"One move and you get a bullet," he said to his captives as, still keeping them covered with his weapon in one hand, he tapped out a radio message to Barr at Detroit, giving the facts of the capture, the location as nearly as he could, and asking that officers be sent at once.

In a few minutes an exultant answer came, saying that Bill Twombley was bringing a squad of Secret Service men.

That attended to, Ted turned to Kost, whose eyes were blazing with hate.

"Hand over those diamonds," he commanded crisply.

"I haven't any diamonds," snarled Kost.

"Oh, yes you have," replied Ted, "but you're not going to have them long."

He went through every part of Kost's clothing but could find nothing. A search of Hardwick was equally fruitless.

A triumphant sneer was on Kost's face.

"Fooled again!" he jeered. "You Secret Service men are easy."

"Yes, I know," agreed Ted. "Vandenken thought so too, I believe."

"Where is Vandenken?" demanded Kost.

"In Rattlesnake Pit," answered Ted shudderingly.

Kost and Hardwick turned pale as they realized what that meant.

"I hate to wreck your plane," Ted went on, "but I must have those diamonds."

"Find them," challenged Kost.

"Easiest thing you know," replied Ted. "I make airplanes. They haven't any secrets from me."

This boast he made good a few minutes later when, from a cunningly concealed aperture in the left wing, he drew forth the whole collection of priceless gems.

Kost's rage was fearful. He foamed at the mouth. He shrieked forth imprecations. His eyes rolled in their sockets. Ted thought for a time the man was going mad, and he was immeasurably relieved when, after several hours, he saw Bill Twombley's plane hovering in the sky above them.

He waved and shouted and the plane descended. It was packed like sardines with men —Barr, Ormsby, Dalton, Anderson and two others, one an air pilot named Wells. They crowded around Ted, showering on him praise and congratulations, and they were almost incoherent in their jubilation at having Kost in their clutches—Kost, the king of smugglers, Kost who had so long gibed and mocked the Government of the United States! Then the richness of this wonderful haul of diamonds left them almost bereft of speech.

The Secret Service men put their prisoners into one of the planes and all three of the machines, manned by Ted and Bill and Wells, set out for Detroit, which they reached in due time and where they handed their prisoners over to the Federal authorities. The diamonds were confiscated and the prisoners were later tried and heavily punished.

"The world shall hear of this," declared Barr, as they all sat on the evening of the capture in Walter Hapworth's room at the hotel.

"People will be calling you the lone eagle of the border. It will be one more feather in the plume of Ted Scott."

"Not on your life!" objected Ted. "I don't want any other reward than the pleasure of having served my country and brought scoundrels to justice. I don't want to be known as a detective. I'm an airman. But, oh, boy, I've certainly had a lot of fun!"

THE END

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